

TEACHERS TALKING: CRITICAL EVENTS IN THE LIFE HISTORY OF STAFF
WORKING WITH CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS.

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Abstract

The role of the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) has undergone radical changes since it was formalised in the SEN Code of Practice (Great Britain. Department for Education and Employment, 1994). These changes have been mirrored by changes in policy for children with special educational needs (SEN) and SENCOs now find themselves working in more complex environments with a plethora of demands. This thesis is set within this contemporary educational scene.

The experiences of the SENCO are the focus of this study and the stories of these teachers have been portrayed through narratives. Their stories focused initially on their reasons for entering teaching and their career progression but subsequently developed into a discussion of the emotional engagement that their job engendered and, indeed, requires. Conversely, emotional experiences in their private lives made teachers more engaged in their support for children with SEN.

The findings give rise to implications for training, recruitment and retention and possible avenues for the evaluation of SENCO practice. The study also proffers suggestions for future research.

Declaration

I declare that while registered for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy [PhD] I have not been a registered candidate or enrolled student of any other award at another academic or professional institution.

This thesis is a record of work carried out entirely by myself and has not been submitted for any other award. All sources of work have been acknowledged.

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LIST OF ACCOMPANYING MATERIAL

Related peer refereed publications

CHAPTERS IN BOOKS

Mackenzie, S. (2009) 'If you could wave a magic wand...' The frustrations and challenges of working in special educational needs in London', in Ang, L., Trushell, J., and Walker, P. (ed.) *Learning and Teaching in a Metropolis*. Amsterdam: Rodolphi, pp. 101-122.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

Mackenzie, S. (2007) 'A review of recent developments in the role of the SENCO in the UK,' *British Journal of Special Education*, 34 (4), pp. 212-218.

Mackenzie, S. (2011) "It's been a bit of a rollercoaster': special educational needs, emotional labour and emotion work', *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, First published on: 17 June 2011 (iFirst) Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2010.538869>. (Accessed 19 July 2011).

Mackenzie, S. (2011) 'I didn't choose SEN, it chose me: careers in special educational needs,' *British Journal of Special Education*, in press.

Mackenzie, S. (2011) '“Yes, but...” Rhetoric, reality and resistance in teaching assistants' experiences of inclusive education',

Support for Learning, 26 (2) pp. 64-71.

Mackenzie, S. (2011) 'I can't imagine doing anything else': why do teachers of children with SEN remain in the profession? Resilience and rewards over time',

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PAPERS PRESENTED AT PEER REVIEWED CONFERENCES

Mackenzie, S. (2011) 'I can't imagine doing anything else': why do teachers of children with SEN remain in the profession? Resilience and rewards over time.

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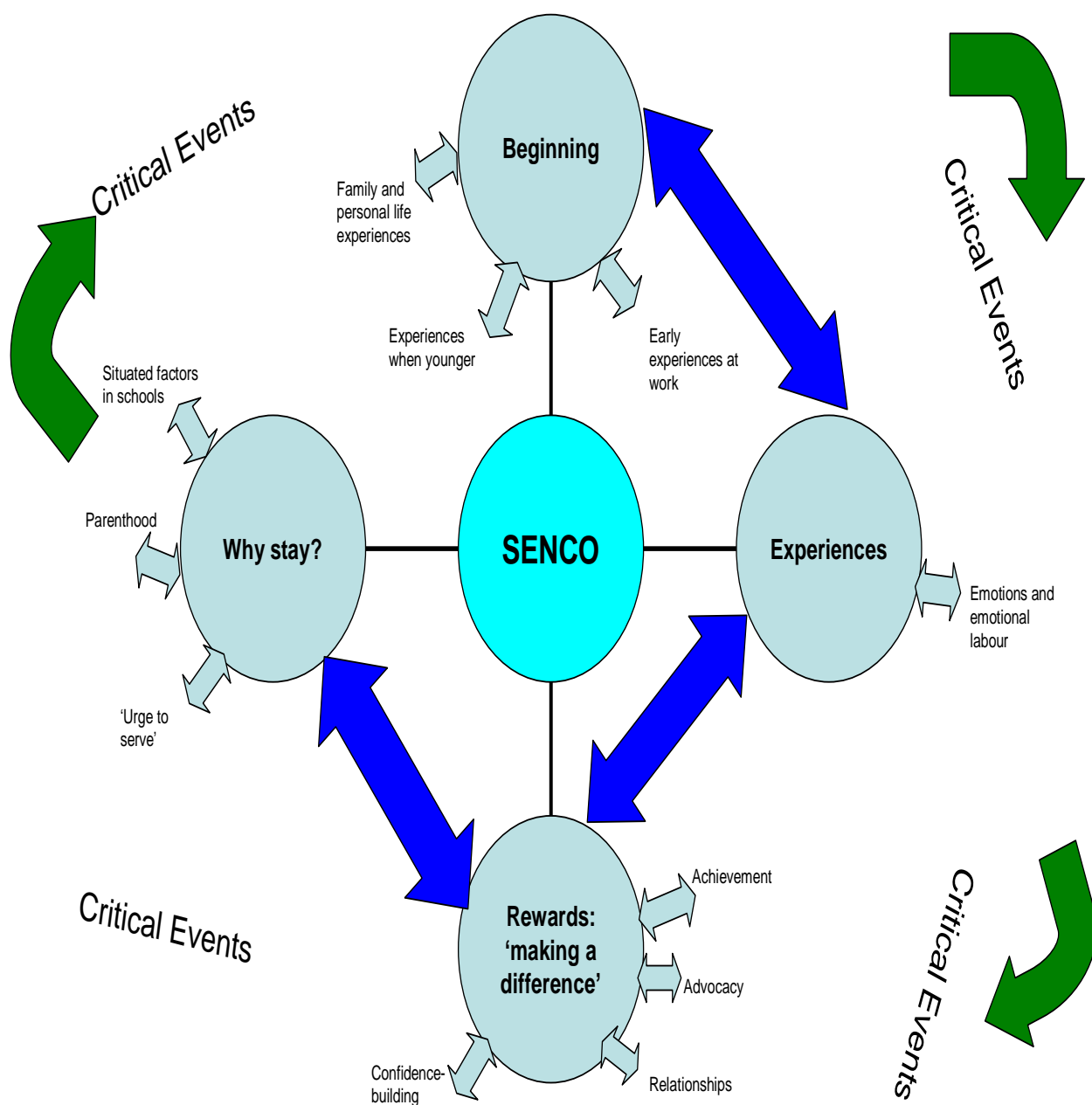
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IN MEMORIAM

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Shirin Denny who was the inspiration for this research.

Figure 1: Critical events in the careers of teachers of children with SEN



CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCING THE STUDY

The role of the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) has become a significant area of research more recently due to policy changes such as Every Child Matters (Great Britain. Department of Education and Skills, 2003), Removing Barriers to Achievement (Great Britain. Department of Education and Skills, 2004) and more recently, the Green Paper (Great Britain. Department for Education, 2010). Due to these changes, the SENCO has now come to be seen as the hub of the support for children with special educational needs (SEN) within a multi-agency framework (Cheminais, 2005; 2010). Much of the research on SENCOs however has been focusing on the technical and operational aspects of the role, and very little other research on other staff who work with children with SEN. There is very little research on the lived experiences of the role. Therefore, I was interested in filling this gap in the research.

The aim of the research was to give voice to participants' experiences, which I felt had been neglected. I have been a member of an online SENCO forum for many years and I was aware of the emotional toll that the job takes (as well as the positive rewards that it brings). My working hypothesis, drawn from my experiences, was that there was something distinct about the reasons for working with children with SEN.

My reading about the topic of teachers' motivations, particularly in the field of life history, focused more generally on teachers' motivations to enter the

profession and remain within it and it emerged from the literature that teachers had particular motivations (for example, caring, 'making a difference' and so on). Additionally, and (to me) unexpectedly, there appeared to be distinct reasons why teachers of children with SEN stayed in the profession, sometimes for thirty years or more, which was often linked to critical incidences in the lives (see p. 7 for a definition of critical incidences).

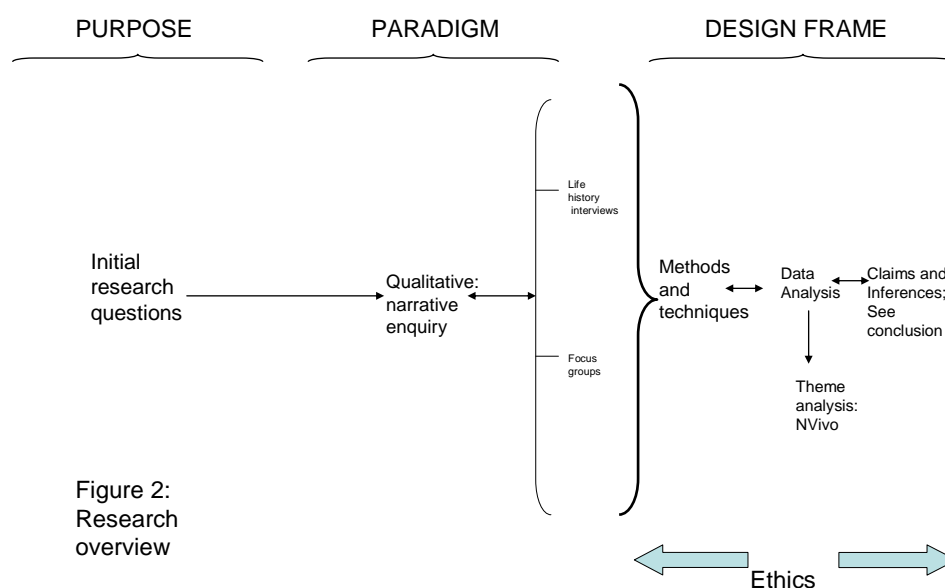
i. The content of the thesis

The order (and titles) of the chapters attempt to illustrate teachers' journeys through their lives and careers, from starting on their journey to reasons why they continued to stay (nine had been teaching for more than 20 years and none had plans to leave).

Related literature is woven throughout the text. Where possible, the chapter titles are drawn from the participants' own words. The conclusions are summarised in Figure 5.

To enhance authenticity and validity, significant portions of the participants' words have been used to elaborate and illustrate certain crucial aspects and to describe critical events. This is aimed to increase the validity and plausibility of the study and also to enhance its credibility. Additionally, where possible, my personal and professional experiences are included and are interwoven throughout the text. According to qualitative feminist researchers Ribbens and Edwards (1998), this approach should add credence to the voice of the

participants. See Chapter Five for more detail on the methodological approach, and see Figure 2 for an overview of the research structure.



This thesis explores the careers of those working with children with SEN through life history stories told to me by 32 SENCOs. The narratives presented demonstrate the journey from beginning to work with children with SEN, moving through their careers and finally to considerations and reflections on retirement (some of the participants had been working for more than 20 years, some for more than 30 years).

As my reflections on the life histories evolved, it became clear that there was something distinct about both the reasons why teachers choose to work with children with SEN and the experiences they have, as compared to the findings in the literature on teachers who do not choose to take this path.

ii. Reflections of the researcher

This research study includes reflections on me as a researcher. The desire to collect data on the reasons why respondents choose to work as SENCOs may also reflect my desire to understand why I went into teaching myself (Munro, 1998) and this was something that I have acknowledged, explored and reflected upon. I have recognised that I may be trying to find out more about myself through using the experiences of others (Munro, 1998; Holland, 2007), and have reflected upon my own perspective on my motivations to carry out the research.

My own perspective, like Cole's (2004, 2005a, 2005b), comes from recent feminist and auto/biographical research which considers reflexivity to be important and challenges a value neutral stance to the research. During my own teaching (which involved elements of teaching children with SEN) I became particularly interested in teachers' experiences of working as a SENCO. I had a close friend who had decided to specialise in inclusive education and I had followed her career path with interest, particularly as elements of her own biography were weaved into her teaching career. After having my own child, I became interested especially in how parenthood made a difference to teaching – whether it affected the decision to teach, and once in teaching how it affected parents' (particularly mothers') career trajectories. Therefore, I wanted to understand teachers' subjective perceptions around education. Participants' stories (and my own) are not objective accounts but personal, subjective and

emotional reflections which are affected by the passing of time and, consequently, imperfect recall (Cole, 2004; Rich, 2004).

I also wanted to reflect on why teachers made the initial decision to teach; for some of the respondents this was many years ago (decades, in some cases) and to see if there were any particular experiences within their own personal lives and careers that led to teaching (and also the decision to stay, as none of the participants expressed a desire to leave education). Although each story is individual, and therefore drawing generalised conclusions is problematic, I have attempted to draw out common threads and analyse shared patterns to see what is distinctive about the decision to work with children with SEN.

iii. Research aims

The research aims developed as the reading for the literature review progressed. Initially, I hypothesised that it was particularly women who took on the role teaching children with SEN, to fulfil a 'caring' role as part of their identity as women and this may be linked to particular critical incidences in their lives such as having children. This was the case in part but was not a major dimension of either the literature review or the subsequent findings. My initial reading alerted me that teachers had a more complicated set of motivations (Day *et al.*, 2007) and also engaged in significant emotional labour (Isenbarger and Zembylas, 2006) and this led me to broaden out the aims to look at participants' motivations more generally. The aims subsequently became:

1. To discover teachers' perceptions of the SENCO role.
2. To analyse critical incidents as reasons for working with children with SEN.
3. To explore emotional experiences as reasons for wanting to work with children with SEN: family experiences, expectations of a female 'caring' role and work experience.

Therefore, the research questions look generally at: teachers' experiences of their changing role; their reasons for working with children with SEN; and then drill down further into the meanings behind these reasons, especially the more emotional factors that may influence why teachers work with such children.

The working hypothesis was that there were unique emotional factors that lead SENCOs and aspiring SENCOs to work with children with SEN.

iv. Defining critical events and incidents

As illustrated in Figure 1, I have chosen to focus on the emotional critical events in a teachers' life course that determine why they choose to work with children with SEN and why they remain in the profession. Emotionally-charged critical incidents in teachers' early lives as pupils can be drawn upon to make sense of teachers' experiences.

Critical events are key determinants in how we recall our life experiences (Webster and Mertova, 2007). Our memory of past critical events often leads us to adopt strategies and processes to apply to new situations. Because

events are critical parts of our lives, using them as a main focus for research provided a valuable and insightful tool for getting at the core of what was important to the participants in influencing their journeys across their teaching careers.

Events become critical when they have 'the right mix of ingredients at the right time and in the right context' (Woods, 1996, p.102). Critical events as told in a story reveals a change of understanding or world-view by the storyteller. A critical event has the following characteristics: it impacts on the performance of the storyteller in a professional or work-related role; it may have a traumatic component, attract some excessive interest by the public or the media, or introduce risk in the form of personal exposure: illness, litigious action or other powerful personal consequences. What makes it critical is the impact on the storyteller, and it is almost always a change experience, and can only even be identified afterwards. It is only in retrospect that an event can be seen to have been critical for the storyteller. The aim of the dissertation was therefore to uncover participants' memories of such events and the impact that they had on their career trajectories.

For Measor (1985) there are three types of critical events - extrinsic, intrinsic or personal, and my respondents' stories largely reflected this classification.

Extrinsic events are historical and political. Intrinsic events happen within a natural progression of a career: entering teaching as a profession; first teaching practice; first 18 months; three years after taking the first job; mid-career moves and promotion; and the pre-retirement period. Lastly, 'personal' critical events

are family events, illnesses and so on. In this study, it was largely intrinsic and personal critical events that influenced respondents' decisions to enter teaching, specialising in teaching children with SEN and remaining in the profession.

Distinct from extrinsic, intrinsic and personal events, other anecdotal and incidental information is called 'other events'. These events may include corridor encounters, lunchtime conversations, and the many informal associations which inform critical events. 'Other events' in this study featured chance conversations and encounters, for example with headteachers, or particular children, or parents.

v. A note on the use of language

For ease of reading, the term 'special educational needs' (SEN) is used to refer to all children with a special need or disability. It is recognised that the group of children with SEN and children with disabilities are not conterminous; however, the group of staff supporting them remains the same and so it was felt that the use of the term 'SEN' to cover all children was justified.

It is also recognised that the use of the term 'special educational needs' is contested as part of a medicalising discourse (see, for example Barton, 2003 for a fuller discussion) but given that the term is embedded within legislation and policy and is in common usage by respondents, the term is used within this study.

The term 'SENCO' is used to cover the variety of roles that respondents held. All were responsible (in different ways) for the provision for children with special educational needs; as well as being SENCOs, their titles included: Inclusion manager; Manager of Additional Needs; Co-ordinator of Sensory Support Services; SEN teacher; and SEN tutor.

vi. Locating the study period

The study is set from 2007 to the present. The conception of the study began before this, as I had a long personal and professional relationship with a SENCO (previously mentioned). The reasons why she began (and remained) in the profession were intriguing as were the emotions she invested in the role.

The role of the SENCO has developed since the 2001 revised Code of Practice (Great Britain. Department of Education and Skills, 2001) and Every Child Matters (Great Britain. Department of Education and Skills, 2003). In this study, it was becoming clear to some participants that the policy of inclusion was having significant consequences for the scope of their role and was leading to an increase in the workload and complexity of the job. The staff in the study were therefore working in a time of flux. The constant changes in roles appear to be continuing with recent policy proposals (Great Britain. Department for Education, 2011). Chapter 2 will now give an overview of the changes in the role of the SENCO in the UK.

CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ROLE OF THE SENCO IN ENGLAND

The role of the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) has been given more attention recently, partly due to the SENCO's ostensibly pivotal role in SEN policy and strategy (Great Britain. Department for Education 2010; 2011). Furthermore, there has been much discussion as a result of the ongoing restructuring of the teaching profession. Previous research has indicated the variations in how SENCOs carry out their diverse role, and this diversity, combined with time constraints, has meant that the SENCO post can be enormously demanding (Szwed 2007a; 2007b). It is the intention of this section to review the existing literature on the role of the SENCO and to document the possible future developments in this challenging and wide-ranging role.

i. The development of the SENCO role

Even before the 1994 Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (Great Britain. Department for Education, 1994) (henceforth, 'the Code'), many schools chose to appoint a teacher to co-ordinate provision for pupils with SEN across the school.

The 1994 Code placed a statutory obligation on all schools to identify a specialist teacher to coordinate provision for pupils with SEN, and it described the roles and responsibilities of the SENCO. Following this, in 1998 the Teacher

Training Agency (TTA) (now the Training and Development Agency; to become the Teaching Agency in 2012) published the national standards against which all SENCOs were advised to audit special needs provision within their schools, including their own skills, and seek out opportunities for professional development, where needed (Great Britain. Teacher Training Agency, 1998). The TTA attempted to capture the 'core purpose' of the SENCO, as someone who would take responsibility for the day-to-day provision made by the school for pupils with SEN and provide professional guidance (Great Britain. Teacher Training Agency, 1998).

The TTA identified four areas where co-ordination was essential for effective SEN provision: strategic direction and development of SEN provision in the school; teaching and learning; leading and managing staff; and efficient and effective deployment of staff and resources.

There was an assumption within the TTA guidelines that the SENCO would be the agent for achieving a whole-school approach to special educational needs, thereby promoting the inclusion of all pupils. (See also Lindqvist *et al.*, (2011) on the similarities with the position of SENCOs in Sweden.) It was not intended that SENCOs would have sole responsibility for pupils with SEN, although this is often how the role was perceived in practice. Implicit in the guidance was the idea of management or leadership. The national standards reflected that the SENCO role had been made much more managerially significant and would clearly require teachers with experience and specific training, although this

leadership role has been by no means guaranteed in schools, as will be discussed later in this section.

Since the introduction of the Code in 1994, the demands of the SENCO role have increased substantially (Goodman and Burton, 2010). Derrington noted three patterns of interpretation of the SENCO role (Derrington, 1997). In the first interpretation, the SENCO retained a substantial teaching load, completing substantial amounts of their SENCO tasks outside of school hours. In the second approach, the SENCO had a reduced teaching commitment and took on sole responsibility for administering the Code of Practice (see also Cowne, 2003). The third interpretation of role was that of the SENCO who maintains a substantial teaching load but shares the duties as described in the Code with colleagues. This variability in role interpretation has continued since the introduction of the revised Code (Great Britain. Department for Education and Skills, 2001) and this finding is also replicated in the Greek context by Agaliotis and Kalyva (2011).

Despite the introduction of the updated Code, huge variations in how SENCOs carried out the role remained regarding time spent on the role and the duties carried out. This makes generalisation about the role difficult, as there are variations in how the role is interpreted between primary and secondary phases and within and between local authorities (Szwed, 2007a). Most respondents in Layton's study (2005) for example could account for their time but displayed, overall, considerable variation in the patterns of their workloads when asked to give an estimate of how much time was taken up with their duties. Sixteen out

of the 27 respondents responded that teacher colleagues were influential in defining their role, and attributed to them the perception of the SENCO as responsible for a wide range of duties (Layton, 2005). SENCOs clearly saw themselves through the eyes of their colleagues as 'fire-fighters', reacting in an attempt to minimise the challenges created by pupils with SEN (see also Abbott, 2007).

Parent and LEA expectations equally accounted for the second most frequently cited determinants of how SENCOs carried out their duties (Layton, 2005).

Parents regarded the SENCO as the repository of all knowledge, resources and contacts whereby their children would receive appropriate support and teaching. The LEA was cast in a less supportive but equally demanding role involving a considerable administrative burden (Layton, 2005).

Headteachers were rated as being a significant source of support by only nine SENCOs. Some SENCOs perceived that school heads expect them to assume a management role, in the narrower sense of 'coping', while overlooking the support that SENCOs required if management was to mean involvement in strategic decisions. Heads did not seem to take into account the workload or responsibility that management involved, and they expected the SENCO would be running the department single-handedly and reporting back to the head and SEN governor (Layton, 2005).

The SENCOs in the study did not believe that the key people and agencies saw them in a leadership role, even though most expect them to 'manage' SEN

matters. However, the Code confirmed the centrality of the SENCO role, and explicitly linked leadership to the role, observing that many primary and secondary schools might 'find it effective for the SENCO to be a member of the senior leadership team' (Great Britain. Department for Education and Skills, 2001, pp. 51, 66). In practice, Layton found that the extent to which SENCOs were formally recognised as leaders varied widely, although SENCOs themselves believed that that they should be part of senior leadership teams in order to work strategically, enabling them to have responsibility for such tasks as budget management and SEN policy and writing.

Contemporary research does indicate the variability of the SENCO role, and in reality it is more useful to discuss SENCO 'roles' given the diversity of tasks they are required to carry out (Szwed, 2007a; Crowther *et al.*, 1997). The responsibilities of the primary SENCO appear to be particularly arduous, with time allocation being the major difficulty in enabling primary SENCOs to carry out their tasks (Szwed, 2007a). Although Szwed's survey found variability in the SENCO role, a consistent finding was that many SENCOs appeared to be full-time teachers in addition to their SENCO responsibilities (Szwed, 2007a). The role was particularly challenging in the primary sector given the current policy emphasis on early intervention. Szwed also found that time to carry out the role varied. As expected, larger schools had more time allocated to the SENCO role than smaller ones, but time allocation was not related to the population of pupils with SEN; Szwed found, for example, several schools with a high proportion of pupils with SEN where the SENCO worked part-time (Szwed, 2007a), and Szwed questions how effective the SENCO can be in such situations.

In line with Layton's research, a National Union of Teachers (NUT) survey examined the impact of the 2001 Code on the work of SENCOs, and found increasing workloads and restricted opportunities for SENCOs to manage special educational provision as they would wish (NUT, 2004). Weddell (2004) summarised messages from a SENCO Forum e-mail group that similarly indicated wide variations in how schools approached the management of special educational needs provision and the impact of this variation on the SENCO role. Again, SENCOs expressed concerns that they were rarely allowed to manage the SEN budget, and some were even unaware of the sums of money allocated to SEN within the school. Similar to previous research, wide variations were found in the extent to which SENCOs were member of the senior leadership team, a finding confirmed by Szwed's review of the role of primary school SENCOs (Szwed, 2007a).

Since the introduction of the updated Code (Great Britain. Department of Education and Skills, 2001), legislation and policy developments have also changed the SENCO role and arguably added to their responsibilities. For example, the Department for Education and Skills strategy for SEN, 'Removing Barriers to Achievement' (Great Britain. Department for Education and Skills, 2004) had significant implications for SENCOs, reiterating their central role in co-ordinating SEN provision, and reinforcing that SENCOs should be part of the senior leadership team. The nature of their role in managing the changes was not, however, closely specified in the strategy document although, in relation to

developing advanced skills for teaching pupils with SEN, the strategy states that SENCOs have:

...a pivotal role, coordinating provision across the school and linking class and subject teachers with SEN specialists to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Great Britain. Department for Education and Skills, 2004, p.58, para 3:14).

The strategy also included the recommendation that:

We want schools to see the SENCO as a key member of the senior leadership team, able to influence the development of policies for whole school improvement (Great Britain. Department of Education and Skills, 2004, p.58, para 3.14).

ii. Variability within the SENCO role

The recent policy documents described above have led to a number of developments in the SENCO role, and subsequently, wide variations in how the role is implemented in practice have been found. The findings of this study also demonstrated this variation (Chapters 7 to 10).

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a. Workload

Crowther *et al.*'s research in 1997 and 2001 found that the lack of time to undertake the role remained the major challenge for SENCOs (Crowther *et al.*, 2001, and see also Cole, 2005; Cowne, 2005; Lingard, 2001; Szwed, 2007b). The amount of time available had deteriorated since the previous study, despite an increase in the number of children on the SEN register. Furthermore, there was a rise in the number of SENCOs reporting that they had no time at all available for the role, which seriously diluted their ability to take part in the strategic developments envisaged by the Code, and, in particular, restricted their ability to take part in curriculum developments.

In primary schools, issues of teaching and learning, and curriculum development, were often matters for the whole staff and therefore the SENCO role became one limited to managing the SEN register and other administrative tasks, such as liaising with the LEA, therefore undermining the strategic role as envisaged in the Code (Crowther *et al.*, 2001, and see also Cole, 2005).

Where the headteacher took on the role of the SENCO, a number of problems arose. The strategic role of the headteacher increased the opportunity for managing change and developing an overview of barriers to learning. However, the increasing demands on headteachers meant that other priorities often took precedence (Crowther *et al.*, 2001).

Another recent development was that SENCOs were being asked to take responsibility for pupils who fell out of the conventional 'SEN' distinctions, i.e. pupils who were gifted and talented, traveller pupils, those with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (Burton and Goodman, 2011) and those with medical conditions, increasing further the demands on SENCO time (Crowther *et al.*, 2001). Many also reported that they did not have extra staff timetabled for SEN work, and that teacher assistant (TA) time for SEN support varied hugely between schools.

Crowther *et al.* believed that the difficulties experienced by SENCOs in raising attainment and also meeting the needs of children with SEN were an indication of 'a fundamental dilemma at the heart of special education' (p. 95): a conflict between policy goals which require schools to raise standards whilst simultaneously becoming more inclusive.

b. SENCO as Arbiter, Rescue, Auditor and Collaborator

Kearns' research (2005) employed a narrative approach to encourage SENCOs to describe incidences of workplace learning, but of more relevance to this discussion was Kearns' focus on the variety of roles that SENCOs undertook.

Firstly, the SENCO as Arbiter was a role that focused upon the rationalisation and monitoring of the use of SEN resources within schools, and examining the effective use and development of staff. Such SENCOs saw their role as learning to help teachers and parents clarify their concerns and feel positive about the

process of inclusion. They liaised and gathered information from a wide variety of sources, including those external to the school.

The SENCO as Rescue was characteristic of SENCOs who focused intensely upon pupils with SEN and planned suitable programmes for them (Kearns, 2005). Such SENCOs reflected intensively about pupils, working with small groups of pupils and parents. They preferred to learn about teacher and pupil learning style, and to work closely to teachers to improve their own practice. These SENCOs experienced great empathy for teachers and pupils in need, and were anxious to improve pupil behaviour and achievement. However, their commitment and enthusiasm created need and demand, and this led to problems in SENCOs managing their time (Kearns, 2005). This group did not claim to influence management, as this was not their focus. However, this lack of interest in management responsibility often limited their capacity to involve other staff in identifying needs and pupil assessment processes.

By contrast, the focus of the SENCO as Auditor was on helping teachers to meet their obligations of the procedures for the identification and assessment of pupils with SEN. Their role emphasised the management of individual pupil plans, meetings, policies and initiatives. Effective communications and decision-making systems were emphasised, and these SENCOs were interested in techniques such as psychometrics, electronic means of programme writing and record keeping, and a focus on legal procedures, particularly as described in the SEN Code. Monitoring, improving and comparing pupil achievement was seen as a major aspect of this role.

The SENCO as Collaborator was interested in meeting teachers and pupils from other schools to share practices. New approaches to teaching and learning were experimented with, and engaging teachers in curriculum development was a major focus (Kearns, 2005). Often, such SENCOs were those who had strong links with classroom teachers and had until recently been classroom teachers themselves. SEN was perceived as an integral part of the school and there was little perception of boundaries between managers and teachers.

A minority of staff in Kearns' study saw themselves as SENCO as Expert, and this role applied mainly to those SENCOs who had additional specialist qualifications in teaching pupils with specific disabilities, and were often in charge of specialist units attached to mainstream schools. They perceived themselves as more autonomous than other SENCOs, but also experienced huge demands due to their expertise. Their focus is often upon the needs of specific individual pupils, and includes some mainstream teachers where possible, although they do not see it as the classroom teachers' role to have adequate expertise in specialist disabilities. Kearns' study adds to the picture of a diverse SENCO role, and the variations in the ways in which SENCOs work are further illustrated in their approach to Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

c. Managing IEPs

Much previous research on the role of the SENCO, discussed above, focused on what were seen as unrealistic workload requirements (see, for example,

Farrell, 1998 for a summary), and research has concentrated on the bureaucratic nature of the IEP process. Frankl (2005) analysed the implementation of a strategy to reduce the number of pupils with IEPs and thereby reduce the workload of SENCOs.

The 2001 Code introduced the idea of Group Education Plans (GEPs) for pupils with similar needs, and Frankl described how this was piloted by primary schools in two outer London boroughs. The study found that, as there were no IEPs to implement, more time was available for the SENCO to review the GEPs with class teachers, learning support teachers and TAs. There was a significant reduction in the paperwork for writing and maintaining IEPs and this has enabled the SENCO to spend more time consulting with colleagues and implementing curriculum interventions (Frankl, 2005). The GEPs meant that teachers took more responsibility for pupils' special needs and had more interest in the specific targets set for those with IEPs. Reading, writing and maths targets could be used as GEP targets, the amount of paperwork decreased and SEN planning was incorporated into target-setting and whole-class planning.

In summary, the introduction of GEPs meant that the workload of the SENCO was reduced regarding managing the bureaucratic aspects of maintaining IEPs, but SENCOs have seen their role develop as coaches and consultants to colleagues and as specialist teachers. Implementation of such changes in a more widespread way needs the support of senior managers to ensure the success of the introduction of GEPs. If the use of GEPs becomes more widely

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adopted, more research will be needed regarding how they impact upon the role of SENCOs and whether or not such plans enable pupils to reach their targets more effectively. (It is proposed that IEPs and GEPs will no longer be required under the proposals in the SEN Green Paper (Great Britain. Department for Education, 2010, 2011.))

d. Managing Teaching Assistants

Extended responsibility for the management of teaching assistants has become an increasing part of the SENCO role in some schools (Gerschel, 2005). This role often involves recruitment, appointment, writing job descriptions, deployment, and monitoring the work of TAs. The management of TAs is often complex and ill-defined (Gerschel, 2005), as, for example, TAs may be managed within the classroom by the subject of class teacher, or the SENCO when supporting pupils with SEN, by faculty heads and heads of department within secondary schools, and headteachers in primary schools.

The specific responsibilities of the SENCO in managing TAs were outlined in the 2001 Code, and included: managing SEN support staff; managing the day to day organisation of resources for SEN, including the deployment of TAs; liaising with and advising TAs on meeting the needs of pupils with SEN; and taking responsibility for induction and training. Participants in Gerschel's study found that this role was improved when the SENCO was within the senior management team and had an input into strategic decisions (Gerschel, 2005 and see also Cole, 2005).

It was often unclear who was managing, working with or supporting TAs (Gerschel, 2005). Joint training sessions between SENCOs and TAs often helped joint working, but take-up of such opportunities was low. Very little time was allocated to SENCOs to work with TAs to jointly plan work and review the progress of pupils with SEN. Good communication between the SENCO and the TA, and between TAs, was vital, as was communicating with parents, whose expectations of what a TA can do were often too high. However, managing other adults was something that SENCOs found to be a difficult aspect of their role. Developing communication with pupils to discover the kinds of support that they require was also seen as important. Managing TAs could also mean having a strong voice in senior management and decision-making (Gerschel, 2005).

e. Monitoring

Cowne (2005) presented the results of research that began as an investigation into the organisational contexts in which SENCOs worked, and continued as an evaluation of an accredited outreach training programme for SENCOs. Data was collected over three years, and focus group work explored SENCOs' views of their constant and emerging work.

Increasingly, SENCOs were being asked to monitor classroom practice and work on aspects of this, such as differentiation. The job of providing in-service training extended this aspect of the role. Managing budgets was part of the role of some SENCOs, due in part to delegated funding. Some felt that there was an

expectation that behaviour management was also part of the SENCO's role, often providing a cooling-off period for children who were upset, and also preventing exclusions (see also Ellis and Tod (2005) on SENCO's role in behaviour management).

A big growth area was in writing SEN policy and developing monitoring systems. More time and effort was being spent in managing a range of non-teaching staff and in training TAs, and this appeared to have overtaken concerns about paperwork as a constraint on the SENCO role (Cowne, 2005). For secondary SENCOs, roles were widening even more due to working with a range of agencies, youth services, the Connexions service and colleges of further education. Many SENCOs felt poorly supported by senior managers. However, where headteachers did support their SENCOs and give at least a reasonable amount of time for the work, SENCOs felt more effective. Cowne's study found that thorough training was essential and this had to have some substance. Evaluations of long courses demonstrated that SENCOs were more secure and competent as a result of this training, and longer-term effects were beginning to be visible in the schools (Cowne, 1995). Wearmouth *et al.*'s study similarly highlighted the importance of training, and looked at the potential to develop more on-line training to help keep staff up to date with recent developments, reduce professional isolation, and encourage collaborative problem-solving (Wearmouth *et al.*, 2004).

Overall, these studies, and Szwed's more recent survey of primary SENCOs (2007a), demonstrate significant expansion and variability in the roles and

responsibilities of SENCOs, and recent changes to the role will potentially increase the diversity of ways in which SENCOs operate.

iii. Changes to the SENCO role

Weddell's commentary on a SENCO Forum message board described changes arising from the restructuring of teachers' roles (Weddell 2006; 2010). The restructuring process showed the wide variability between schools in how the headteachers and governors understood the SENCO role, with some staff having their responsibilities taken away, such as responsibility for managing teacher assistants, with the result that the SENCO's additional allowance was withdrawn. There was also some evidence that TAs with no teaching or special needs qualifications are being appointed as SENCOs and not being paid on a teacher's salary (Weddell, 2006) (although since September 2010 all new SENCOs need to be qualified teachers).

Similarly, the Education and Skills Committee enquiry on SEN (Parliament. House of Commons, 2006) took evidence from a variety of witnesses who expressed concern about developments in the SENCO's role, many of whom argued that although teaching assistants could carry out the administrative and routine aspects of a SENCO's job, the SENCO needed to be part of the leadership team and have an overview of strategic developments in the school. Additionally, being a qualified teacher was felt to give credibility and authority to the SENCO role, particularly when relating to and working with other teaching staff. Perceived effectiveness of the SENCO was often linked to being part of

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the senior leadership team (Parliament. House of Commons, 2006). The Department of Education and Skills' view was that it although it would be a 'highly exceptional case' where a school appointed a non-qualified teacher to the role of the SENCO, it did not rule out the possibility that this could be appropriate in some cases and wished to retain school's flexibility to appoint who they wish to the role (Parliament. House of Commons, 2006). (Since September 2011, all new SENCOs need to be qualified teachers and undertake a prescribed course of training (Great Britain. Training and Development Agency, 2011.))

The final Education and Skills Committee report echoed MacBeath *et al.*'s recommendations (2006) that SENCOs should 'in all cases be qualified teachers and in a senior management position in the school...The role and position of a SENCO must reflect the central priority that SEN should hold within schools' (Parliament. House of Commons, 2006 p.74). In a letter to the Directors of Children's Services, the Department for Education and Skills confirmed that the SENCO should be a teacher and part of the senior leadership team, although the letter does concede that aspects of the SENCO role might be delegated to other members of staff (Great Britain. Department of Education and Skills, 2007). SENCOs new to the profession are also required to follow a new qualification route (Great Britain. Training and Development Agency, 2011). Despite the recommendation that SENCOs should be part of the senior leadership team, many report a tension in their role; they feel that they have little influence on whole-school policy whilst simultaneously being

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expected to maintain responsibility for children with SEN (Oldham and Radford, 2011).

iv. SENCO effectiveness

As described above, much of the previous research on SENCOs has focused on the impact of legislative and policy changes on the nature of the role, with a particular concentration on workload issues. Very little work had been carried out on the effectiveness of the SENCO role, despite the role's prominence in SEN policy documents and the introduction of the national standards for SENCOs (Great Britain. Teacher Training Agency, 1998). 'Effectiveness' is very difficult to measure, and can be operationalized very differently using indicators such as pupil achievement; satisfactory administrative procedures; specialist knowledge in particular disabilities and so on. Another consideration is that a lot of work that SENCOs do may not be visible, and does not translate easily into measurable outcomes as defined by current education policy, making any definition or measurement of 'effectiveness' difficult.

Ofsted's recent review of the inclusion framework indicated some positive effects of the SENCO role, although little detail is included on this (Great Britain. Office for Standards in Education, 2004). Some successful aspects of the SENCO role include the raising of awareness of inclusion issues through specialist training, although attitudes and practice have been slow to change (Great Britain. Office for Standards in Education, 2004, p.7). More critical findings indicated that SENCOs lacked confidence in developing provision for

pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD), (Great Britain. Office for Standards in Education, 2004, p.9) and found it difficult to take on responsibility for such pupils. There was also confusion in responsibility between the SENCO, the pastoral system and senior leadership team. SENCOs were also found to be ineffective in monitoring the work of TAs, and when monitoring did take place, useful feedback on TA performance was not given, although arguably the administrative burdens associated with the role presumably made this additional monitoring role difficult to carry out.

MacBeath *et al.*'s research (2006) indicated elements of the SENCO role that enabled successful inclusion. One element leading to success was the expertise of staff, including the SENCO. A reception teacher was quoted as follows:

I think [inclusion] works here because we are all so positive about it. We have a very enthusiastic and supportive head and we also have [the SENCO]- and what would we do without her. It also works because we've got a very experienced core of learning support assistants and that is the crux of the matter. And they all have different strengths and different expertise – and I think they are the schools most valuable resource. (MacBeath *et al.*, 2006, p. 27).

However, according to MacBeath *et al.*'s survey, the role of SENCOs in giving pedagogical advice to TAs and teachers appears to have diminished as the SENCO role appeared to be 'largely administrative, consisting of coordinating

arrangements for deploying support staff, meeting with individual teachers, pupils and parents and liaising with outside professional bodies' (MacBeath *et al.*, 2006, p.38). According to MacBeath *et al.* this lack of involvement in the curriculum may also lie in SENCO's backgrounds: few had qualifications in SEN issues. Furthermore, as the posts carried a high administrative load, they were frequently offered to staff that had qualifications in subjects with less 'academic prestige' (MacBeath *et al.*, 2006, p. 39).

Other research that has been carried out on effectiveness focused on trainee teachers (Blake and Monahan, 2006; Golder *et al.*, 2005) or examined the potential of small-scale, action research for improving practice within individual classrooms or schools (Garner and Rose, 2006). No evaluation has been carried out on the impact of the SENCO role or the effectiveness of the national SENCO standards, and further work is needed to define 'effectiveness', perhaps exploring how SENCOs themselves view their own impact and the opportunities and limitations embedded in their role.

As has been argued, SENCOs carry out their role in diverse settings, with considerable variations in how the role is interpreted (see Oldham and Radford, 2011 on the tensions and variability within the leadership role, for example). This makes generalisation about the role difficult. SENCOs' work varies according to factors such as: setting i.e. primary or secondary; time allocation; membership of the senior leadership team and whether or not they have other responsibilities. Research has pointed consistently to the breadth of the SENCO

role, with many feeling that they are being asked to do the impossible (Lingard, 2001).

v. Policy updates: 2010 onwards

The coalition government's Green Paper on SEN (Great Britain. Department for Education 2010; 2011) presages changes to the SENCO role. It is unclear how the proposals will directly affect SENCOs although it has been clarified that free schools will have to appoint a qualified teacher to meet the needs of children with SEN (Maddern, 2011). The role of the SENCO will more than likely change regarding the proposed new assessment process; transition arrangement; changes in the role of the local authority and changes to statutory assessment procedures (Wedell, 2010), as well as the central (and growing) role in supporting children with BESD and consequently greater collaboration with parents (Burton and Goodman, 2011). At the time of writing, it is not clear what the final proposals will be but it appears that, as a minimum, the whole - school role and between – school liaison functions will widen (Wedell, 2010). It has not been decided if the requirement for new SENCOs to undertake the National Award will continue or what the funding arrangements for this course will be (Great Britain. Training and Development Agency, 2011; Hallett and Hallett, 2010; Cheminais 2010).

This section has reviewed the policy changes in the role of the SENCO, noting changes to the breadth of the role and an increase in workload. The most recent policy changes appear to foreshadow a further widening of the role,

although the consequences of the Green Paper are yet to be seen. These are the more practical, instrumental aspects of the role, however, and the focus of the dissertation will now move to the more affective dimensions of working with children with SEN. Chapter 3 will review the literature on the experiences and critical incidents across the life course of those working with children with SEN: beginning as a SENCO; the emotion work involved in the role; the effects of gender and parenthood on the task; and why respondents decide to stay and work with children with SEN, some for several decades.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

The type of review undertaken was a traditional or narrative literature review (Hart, 1998). This type of review critiques and summarizes a body of literature and draws conclusions about the topic in question. The body of literature is made up of the relevant studies and knowledge that address the subject area: in this case, why teachers began working with children with SEN. This review was typically selective in the material it used, as described below. This type of review was useful in gathering together a volume of literature in the specific subject area and summarizing and synthesizing it.

The literature search strategy began by examining the general motivations to entering work with children with SEN. As there was very little work in this area, I broadened the search out to examine teachers' general motivations to enter the profession. This led me to the work of Day *et al.* (2007) which highlighted the role of 'making a difference' in teachers' motivations to teach. This in turn led me to consider the emotional dimension of teachers' work, which drew me towards the body of research stemming from Hochschild's ground-breaking study of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983). The gendered dimension of emotional labour was also emphasised in the research, which led me to consider if this was in some way linked to the predominance of women who work with children with SEN. This psychosocial area of research then moved my analysis to into the concept of resilience, drawn from positive psychology. Research was beginning to emerge on what factors led people to stay within the profession (again, touched on in Day *et al.*'s research, 2007).

Beginning as a SENCO

There is little existing research on motivations to enter work with children with SEN. Previous research on the general motivations to enter teaching has looked at critical incidents in personal lives/biography and work experiences as motivators to work as a teacher. This section of the chapter reviews the literature on motivations to working with children with SEN. It aims to establish if there is something distinctive about the motivations of those who choose to work in this area and role, and argues that personal, biographical influences and early work experiences largely explain the desire to enter work in this area.

In line with previous research (Day *et al.*, 2007; Ball and Goodson, 1985; Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996; Smith, 2005; Trotman and Woods, 2001 and Cole, 2004) this chapter will examine the influence of biographical influences and personal lives on the decision to enter teaching, focusing particularly on the desire to work as a SENCO. The relative influence of personal experiences when younger compared to experiences within work will be examined. Personal and biographical factors to be examined include incidents in teachers' lives and the influence these may have had on the decision to work as a SENCO. The section will also discuss the distinctive motivations for this work, such as early experience of teaching children with SEN, having a disabled child, one's own disability, and/or having a disabled sibling.

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i. The initial decision to enter teaching

Despite the paucity of research on the decision to teach children with SEN, other research on teaching as a career has identified family members, the role of chance, early experiences, critical incidents in one's personal life, and the desire to 'make a difference' as being significant influences on why teachers entered the profession.

According to Day *et al.* (2007), those who select teaching were frequently influenced in their career choice by family members and by significant teachers in their own schooling. While some variation may occurred over time, these basic themes emerged in the many studies of the reasons for teaching as a career choice.

Participants in Day *et al.*'s study were asked why they had entered teaching. The most frequently given reason was that that they mainly wanted to enter teaching to make a difference - which included having a positive impact on pupils' lives, helping them improve themselves, contributing to the community and working with children. Early experiences were particularly influential and critical incidents in respondents' lives helped in the formation of the decision to enter teaching (see also Schutz *et al.* 2001; Thornton and Bricheno, 2002; Hayes, 2004; Cameron and Moss, 2002; Day and Leitch, 2001). Critical incidents can be defined as vivid, highly charged moments, based on specific, real world occurrences involving things with which those concerned have some personal experience (Sikes, 1997). (See the Introduction p.7 for further

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exploration of the definition.) Critical incidents were often around coaching experiences, early caring experiences (Sargent, 2000; Cameron and Moss, 2002; Sumision, 2005; Rich, 2004), negative practical experiences of teaching and 'critical phases' in a teachers' life (Measor, 1985).

ii. Parenthood

Parenthood is a critical incident in anyone's life, and particularly for those who have a child with SEN (see later sections for an exploration of motherhood, gender and parenting). A lot of research in this area has been criticised for being based on small, white middle-class samples and the consequent problems of generalisation. Cole's research (2005) stems from becoming a mother of a child with SEN. Her combined experiences as a teacher and a mother affected her views on inclusion and a quest to explore inclusion and exclusion (Cole, 2005). Similarly, many of the parent-teachers in Sikes' study (1997) felt that their feelings of care and love for the children in their classes intensified when they had their own children, similar to the respondents in Cole's study (2005). The teachers who were also parents of children with special needs began to feel much closer to the children at school. They also felt a greater connection with parents and respected their feelings more as they understood more how parents felt and developed a greater understanding of the advocacy role that parents take on. Mother-teachers also became more understanding of difficulties that parents experienced, for example in making early meetings when they had other children to get to school, and consequently become more supportive of other mothers. The challenges of dealing with other

professionals were also faced by the mother-teachers, despite their own professional status (Cole, 2004; 2007) and they shared with other parents a sense of helplessness when dealing with professionals in relation to their own children. Other professionals often ignored their experiences as mothers and teachers (Antolini, 2005; Cole, 2005).

Parents particularly wanted their children to be treated with 'dignity' and 'care' (Cole, 2005, p. 337). It was important for parents for teachers to have open relationships with the school, reflecting their care for the child; it was children's comfort and safety that were the most important considerations for parents, as well as giving them more responsibility. A shared willingness to make inclusion work was important for the mother-teachers, particularly making the everyday lived experiences more manageable for them and their children within an inclusive system.

iii. Gender and working with children with SEN

From the statistical data available, a relatively complex picture emerges regarding gender and the choice of teaching as a career. No statistical data exists on the gender breakdown of teachers working with children with SEN. Of the 810,000 teachers working in maintained schools, 3.0% are in receipt of an SEN allowance which *may* indicate that they occupy the SENCO role (Great Britain. Department for Education, 2012); however, this figure is not disaggregated by gender. Generally, most teachers are female (74.6%) with 65.2% of headteachers being female. 26,300 men teach in the primary and

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nursery sector compared to 165,400 women; but this figure rises to 75,000 men in secondary schools as opposed to 117,800 women, perhaps reflecting the relatively higher status of work in secondary schools. Of the 14,000 teachers in special education, 3,700 are men and 10,300 are women (Great Britain. Department for Education, 2012).

There are more female headteachers than male headteachers in nursery and primary schools (11,800 female headteachers; 4,900 male headteachers). Men are slightly more likely to be heads in secondary, again, perhaps reflecting the arguably higher status of secondary school work (1,900 men are headteachers as opposed to 1,100 women.) There are no gender differences in headships in the special school sector (Great Britain. Department for Education, 2012).

Therefore, there is a mixed picture regarding gender and education: women are more likely to be teachers and headteachers overall but men are more likely to be heads of secondary schools. There is no data on the gender breakdown of those in SENCO positions, although it may be safe to assume that, given that women outnumber men overall in teaching, most SENCOs will be women. The relationship between gender and teaching as a career choice will now be explored.

Apart from Cole's research (2004; 2005a; 2005b; 2007) there is little previous research on teachers working in SEN and the influence of gender on this career choice, but there exists a well-documented body of research around discourses of 'care' and teaching as 'women's work' although again, this tends to be based on small, non-generalisable samples (see Zhang, 2008; Richards and Acker, 2006; Cammack and Phillips, 2002; Tamboukou, 2002; Steedman, 1992;

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George and Maguire, 1998 ; Freeman and Schmidt, 2000; Murray, 2006; Schiwy, 2000; and Griffin, 2000).

Women's mothering experience did bring advantages (Griffiths, 2002). Many recognised that such skills could be related to the national standards for trainees and built into their teaching. In particular, the skills were those associated directly with children, and those indirectly related. The women all felt that because they were used to dealing with children, they could relate to them easily (see also Bassett (2005) on the advantages of university teachers' nurturing relationships with older students). Some were teaching children the same age as their own, which they felt was mutually beneficial. The trainees also felt that they knew how to talk to children at the right level, and that their children's development gave them an insight into children's learning and emotional development and adapt their teaching approaches accordingly. They often tried out these approaches with their own children first. Students also drew upon their mothering experiences in their course assignments.

Similar to Cole's research (2005a; 2005b), the women also felt that their experience as working mothers and parents enabled them to relate more to the teachers and to parents than younger trainees. They felt that they had a good understanding of pupils' parents and felt sympathetic towards them, having had experience of juggling numerous responsibilities. In addition, their organisational ability was an important skill which allowed them to plan and organise their teaching activities effectively and also organise their own lives in an effective way. Time management and prioritisation, as well as the ability to deal with stress, were skills that the women believed that they used often,

drawn from their experience as a mother (see also Holloway, 2005, on how the skills developed in motherhood are used in higher education; and White, 2008; Healy, 1999).

Research demonstrates that mothers saw teaching as a career choice that fitted in with their role as mothers (see also White, 2008; Griffiths, 2002). The working conditions and the nature of the work allowed them to also fulfil domestic responsibilities. Their roles as mothers also influenced their choice to enter teaching. Parenting had given them the confidence, knowledge and skills to enter teaching (see also Griffiths, 2002). They believed that as mothers, they had something to offer teaching, and being mothers had rekindled an earlier desire to enter teaching. However, in practice, balancing teaching and motherhood can prove difficult, particularly managing the emotional demands of both school and family life (Cinamon and Rich, 2005; Zhang, 2007).

In conclusion, previous research has found the prevalence of the caring discourse around women and teaching. However, women often drew on their caring experiences positively, and for many, motherhood was a motivating factor when deciding to enter teaching. The difficulties women experienced were often practical, around issues of childcare, for example. Teachers who were also mothers of children with SEN faced extra challenges such as dealing with outside agencies, but often their experiences were drawn on positively to ensure that the children that they taught had a better experience of school than their own children did (Cole, 2005). Discourses around teaching and caring can

impact negatively upon men, who often felt ambivalent about their caring roles and unsure of the expectations on them.

iv. Sibling relationships

Little work has been done in the UK on the impact having a disabled sibling may have on life events such as careers choice or psychosocial outcome, and the literature on adult siblings is fairly limited and lacks representative samples, making generalisation difficult (Doody *et al.*, 2010). Heller and Arnold's systematic review of the literature in this area (2010) demonstrates that the research paints a mixed but generally positive picture of the psychological impact of having a sibling with a disability or special need. The research also demonstrates that siblings tend to have long-lasting and close relationships with disabled siblings and presume that they will take on a greater caring role as both grow older (and indeed the sibling relationship will be the longest one that each experiences, given that many disabled people are living longer than would have been expected in the past – see Heller and Arnold, 2010; Doody *et al.*, 2010).

Little research has been carried out on career destinations (and the studies that do exist tend to be small-scale studies and quite dated as discussed in Konstam and Drainoni, 1993). One study demonstrated no relationship between career aspirations and having a sibling (Burton and Parks, 1994) but Marks *et al.* (2005) found that siblings were influenced by having a disabled brother or sister to work in special education. Parents' clear communication about future caring responsibilities influences much closer interaction between siblings and

positively influenced career paths into special education. However, this sample size was only seven and so it is difficult to justify drawing definitive conclusions from the study. The respondents all felt that having a disabled sibling had positively affected their career choice, and they identified a desire to improve services for disabled people. Many expressed a desire to teach children with special educational needs, so that they could reach other children in a way that they felt their own siblings had not been reached, although some felt that being a teacher would not be enough for the far-reaching changes that they wanted to see in the system. Some participants stated that if they had not had a sibling with a disability, they would have chosen a completely different career path (Marks *et al.*, 2005).

As might be expected, the frequency and type of contact between siblings with and without disabilities varies and varies according to the type of disability. Women tended to be more involved than men in their disabled sibling's life, and were often expected to have a future care-giving role (cited in Heller and Arnold, 2010). There appears also to be a slight advantage in terms of physical and mental health for the non-disabled sibling of adults with Down's syndrome as opposed to siblings with disabilities such as autistic spectrum disorder, and these siblings appear to maintain close ties (Hodapp and Urbano, 2007). As people with Down's syndrome are increasingly reaching their forties, fifties and sixties, this first generation of sibling caregivers requires further research attention.

v. *Identity as a 'teacher of children with SEN'*

The research outlined above largely did not address the motivations of those who specialise in supporting children with SEN. Only one contemporary study has examined the particular identities formed by teachers of children with special educational needs, an identity which reflects their motivation to enter the field. Jones (2004) analysed teacher identity for a group of fourteen teachers of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. For some of the teachers, their identity was separate to that of their other teaching colleagues and this identity manifested itself in a commitment to a cause that was deep-rooted and complex. Issues of teacher identity emerged as an important element in the teachers' discussions about their work. Commitment to a cause came out strongly in Jones' interviews with the teachers and they were particularly committed to helping parents to 'fight' for appropriate provision for their child. However, some saw the commitment to a cause as problematic, as they felt it created images of 'martyrs' and 'benevolence', which the teachers did not want to be associated with.

Similar to Day *et al.* (2007), Jones found that SEN teachers' professional identity of wanting to make a difference was formed when they were young (Jones, 2004). In some instances, identities that are developed at a young age became very firmly established. Often, experiences of visiting what was judged to be poor quality provision, or visiting a long stay hospital, for example, had a

lasting impact. Such 'critical incidents' helped to determine people's motivation to work in SEN and often explained why they stayed in the profession for many years.

Why stay? Resilience and teachers of children with SEN

There has been a substantial amount of research on why teachers leave (Smith and Ingersoll, 2004), but little on why they stay, especially the reasons for why teachers of children with SEN remain in the profession. Issues such as the availability of administrative support when teaching children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) (Albrecht *et al.*, 2009) and having a strong network of support (Gehrke and McCoy, 2007) have been highlighted as predictors of who will stay working with children with SEN, but these are the only two small-scale studies to even obliquely touch on the career paths of those working with children with SEN. The particular career paths of teachers of children with SEN are worthy of study as it appears that they have distinct reasons for entering the profession (Mackenzie, 2011a) and have specific emotional experiences throughout their career (Mackenzie, 2011b) (see previous section).

This section of the chapter will follow Day *et al.*'s work (2007) in examining the factors that determine which teachers will exhibit resilience and stay in the profession.

Despite many teachers leaving the profession, there are many others who stay (Day and Gu, 2009). However, there is little information on the factors that help teachers to remain in the profession for a long time. It is not simply a matter of resources, or class size, bureaucracy, personal status or salary. The reasons why teachers stay in the profession are more complex (Day and Gu, 2009) and this section will address some of these issues, particularly around family life, particular situated factors, and most importantly a sense of vocation (or the 'urge to serve') which is inculcated when working with children with SEN.

i. Resilience

The concept of 'resilience' emerged from the field of positive psychology and was an attempt to focus on the more favourable factors that enable an individual to manage adversity (Howard and Johnson, 2004). The concept has been criticised, however, due to the difficulty of satisfactorily operationalising 'resilience' (Luthar *et al.*, 2000). Howard and Johnson (2004) used the concept of 'resilience' to examine why some teachers coped successfully with the same kinds of stressors that defeat others. Key features of teachers who avoided burnout were a pervasive sense of agency (teachers believed that they could control what happened to them) and an ability to depersonalize unpleasant or difficult events. Having a moral purpose (i.e. teachers' feelings that they wanted to make a difference) was also a buffer against burnout. Resilient teachers also had a strong support group outside of work. The final protective factor was having pride in achievement and a sense of one's own competence.

Day *et al.* (2007) argue that resilience is of importance to teaching for three reasons. First, it is unrealistic to expect pupils to be resilient if their teachers do not demonstrate resilient qualities. Second, teaching is a demanding job. Third, resilience, defined as a capacity to continue to 'bounce back', to recover strengths or spirit quickly and efficiently in the face of adversity, is closely linked to a strong sense of vocation, self-efficacy and motivation to teach which are fundamental to a concern for promoting achievement in all aspects of students' lives. In Day *et al.*'s research (2007) teachers were found to have common characteristics and concerns within six professional life phases. In these groupings there were those whose commitment was being sustained and others whose commitment was declining, and a variety of factors could explain this differing commitment.

Teachers' capacities to be resilient will be influenced (positively or negatively) by key influencing factors such as professional life phases, teacher identities and mediating facts i.e. the personal, the situated and the professional. This study found similar factors leading to teachers' resilience across their careers, particularly around a sense of vocation.

ii. Professional phases

Empirical research on teachers' commitment, resilience and perceived effectiveness and how it grows or diminishes in their lifetime has been quite limited (Day *et al.*, 2007) and furthermore, research on teachers of children with SEN is non-existent. Studies on teachers' professional careers are relatively

small-scale (Ball and Goodson, 1985) and often the research is on the same school phase. Studies also tend to look at teachers career patterns from the perspective of age ranges, rather than looking at the impact of factors independent of age. Day *et al.* by contrast found that it is the complex interplay between teachers' professional and personal needs at different times in their lives that influences their professional life development, rather than simply age *per se*. The notion of 'professional lives' (Day *et al.*, 2007, p. 68) rather than career lives enables a more holistic understanding of the complex factors which influence teachers in different phases of their work, and how these affect their effectiveness.

The key influences identified as shaping teachers' professional lives were: i. situated factors, such as pupil characteristics, site-based leadership and staff collegiality; ii. professional factors, such as teachers' roles and responsibilities, educational policies and government initiatives; iii. personal factors such as health issues and family support and demands (Day *et al.*, 2007, p. 69). It is the interaction of these factors over the professional life span that produces relatively positive or negative outcomes in terms of teachers' motivation, commitment, resilience and perceived effectiveness, and such perceived effectiveness might actually itself influence effectiveness.

In particular, situated factors (such as leadership of the school and department, staff collegiality, teacher-pupils relationships and behaviour of pupils) were found to be contributing influences which contributed positively and/or negatively to teachers' efficacy, commitment and perceived effectiveness. Day

et al. (2007) also extended previous work on teachers' careers by investigating the variations in the impact of critical influences on teachers and their effects in different phases of their professional lives. The existence of daily positive events has been found to be a predictor of teachers' resilience; it is not negative events at school but the absence of positive ones which is the best predictor of staff leaving the profession (Morgan, 2010).

iii. Veteran teachers

To remain in the profession for a length of time, teachers need to develop and maintain reserves of resilience. The teachers in Kirk and Wall's study (2010) demonstrated considerable resilience in maintaining their personal identities as teachers. This is resilience derived from a deep-seated historical sense of themselves as exemplifying qualities such as caring, vocation and child-centredness, with teachers often pointing to the Plowden report (1967) as characterising such values.

Many of the teachers in Kirk and Wall's study spoke with disappointment and dismay about the changes to education from the 1980s onwards, expressing the view that education and teaching had been profoundly damaged. Teachers therefore expressed loss but also demonstrated resilience; they had the capacity to recognise the perceived negative changes to the system whilst maintaining a sense of themselves as caring and child-centred.

The veteran teachers of Day and Gu's study (2009) similarly experienced sustained challenges to their resilience and effectiveness, due to their longer time in the profession. The study was of those who had been in the profession for over 20 years and examined how and why teachers' professional lives sustain or do not sustain their beliefs and commitment to teaching.

The provision of appropriate and responsive leadership support in the work context is the key to ensuring the quality and effectiveness of veteran teachers' professional lives. When such support is available, veteran teachers sustain their commitment and effectiveness despite possible health problems and other negative influences in their work and lives. Their experiences, their educational values and their sense of vocation serve as sources of wisdom and strength which enable them to bounce back from adverse circumstances and fulfil their original vocation to teach (Day and Gu, 2009).

Veteran teachers often have an 'inner urge' at the start of their professional lives (Hansen, 1995) and this inner urge has a decisive impact on their perceptions of their role and of their students and upon their willingness to exercise their agency and resilience in difficult conditions to sustain and improve the quality of their work. However, a lack of support or recognition of worth in the work environment can lead to diminishing commitment, decreasing job satisfaction and enthusiasm and a sense of detachment. Alternatively, trust and support from a headteacher can often revive a teacher's sense of vocation and give a teacher a sense of motivation. Many veteran teachers remained effective and

exhibited a strong commitment to their work, particularly when support from senior management was forthcoming.

Teachers with 24-30 years of experience were also more likely to face extreme life phase scenarios such as challenging pupil behaviour, new initiatives, adverse personal events and career stagnation. These were key negative influences on their morale and professional identity. Many of these teachers were aged 45 plus and were undergoing life phase transition and a change in identity and were facing increasing age-related deficits and work-life tensions. What was significant was resilient teachers' capacity to build upon favourable influences and positive opportunities in their work and life contexts, to overcome the emotional tensions of the scenarios in the environments which they experienced, and to maintain positive emotions and a sense of vocation over a sustained period of time (Day *et al.*, 2007).

For the three successful teachers focused on in Day *et al.*'s study, their 'inner motivation to serve' (Hansen 1995 p. 6) had called them into teaching and it had been this very motivation and a sense of meaning and moral purpose that underpinned the pursuit of effectiveness. These internal values and motivations provided them with the resilience which enabled them to meet the demands of the changing and challenging environments in which they worked and the daily challenges they had. As a consequence, the potentially negative effects of experiencing stressful work and life events were managed and translated into positive resources upon which these teachers could draw and benefit when developing and sustaining their positive life trajectories over the course of their

careers. In summary, it is a combination of factors that can adversely affects teachers' commitment; poor leadership, changes in the social dynamic of classroom teaching, working conditions, challenges to long-held notions of professional identity and well-being as well as generational and ageing factors (Day and Gu, 2009). Conversely, attending to the broader well-being of staff through building trust and through genuine regard are factors in maintaining the resilience and effectiveness of teachers.

As might be expected, therefore, it appears that a variety of factors help to explain why teachers begin and remain in the profession: personal, professional and situated factors and how those interact with a person's life phase. What this present study highlights is a unique factor - the commitment to children with SEN within an inclusive system - which, together with personal life factors, helps to explain why teachers of children with SEN stay in the profession (Chapter 10). The difficulty with the research in this area is the small samples and the consequent difficulties with generalisation; additionally, due to the lack of a longitudinal approach, it is difficult to say if or why such teachers subsequently stay in the profession (or even to discover if they leave).

CHAPTER FOUR: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS, EMOTION WORK AND EMOTIONAL LABOUR

This chapter will outline the research on emotional labour and attempt to operationalise key concepts such as 'emotion work' and 'emotional labour'. It will critically review the research in this area and also examine why a narrative life history approach, utilising interviews and focus groups, is more suitable for this research subject. The methodology will be outlined in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Having decided to work with children with SEN, teachers' experiences are then characterised by a variety of intense emotional experiences. Working with children with SEN is becoming increasingly demanding. Over the past 20 years, research within the UK has documented work overload, a loss of spontaneity and reflective time, an increase in stress and a burgeoning of bureaucracy within teaching (Day *et al.*, 2007). It has also been argued that the way that teachers think and feel has been exploited, with teachers being caught in the 'trap of conscientiousness' (Campbell *et al.*, 1991), doing their best to meet the prescribed targets, but compromising the quality of learning and their own health in the process. Due to job intensification and increased workload, Nias (1989) suggested that the 'culture of care' was breaking down in the primary school (see also Woods, 2001; Forrester, 2005). This section of the chapter will analyse the emotional impact of these developments, particularly on those working with children with SEN, and see if new developments in policy as well as day-to-day micro issues in the classroom influence teachers' emotional

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experiences of the job and conversely how emotions help to determine teachers' attitudes to their work.

i. The importance of emotions

Traditional research on the emotional aspects of working in education tended to focus on stress (e.g. Dunham, 1992; Forlin, 2001) whereas more recent research has examined a wider range of emotional experiences and highlighted the complexity of feelings associated with teaching. Teachers often possess a strong personal commitment towards their profession, and teachers' emotions influence the formation of their identities (O'Connor, 2008). According to Nias (1989), teachers as people cannot be separated from their craft, as the act of teaching requires an individual to possess a genuine emotional empathy towards others. Regarding positive emotions, teaching involves nurturance, connectedness, warmth and love (Hargreaves, 1994) and each teacher's individual beliefs about their role in caring for students form a crucial part of their identity. According to Hargreaves, teaching is 'charged with positive emotion' (Hargreaves, 1998 p. 835). Nias' study (1989) similarly found that teachers tended to invest their sense of self in their work, and to have congruent public and personal identities as a result. Such research on teachers' work has also emphasised the importance of care and commitment, suggesting that many teachers define themselves as people through the roles they play within their professional lives (discussed in O'Connor, 2008). These ethical and humanistic dimensions of teachers' work frequently act as a source of intrinsic

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motivation for individual teachers, and inspire them to remain committed to the profession.

ii. Emotion work and emotional labour: definitions

The importance of emotions within teaching has been highlighted by research that argues that teachers, particularly female teachers, have become engaged in emotion work and emotional labour. This research stems from the much-discussed initial conceptualisation of emotional labour by Hochschild (1983) which lead to extensive further research in this area. Hochschild's definition of emotional labour is that it serves to:

induce or suppress feelings in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others...This kind of labour calls for a coordination of mind and feelings, and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honour as deep and integral to our personality (Hochschild, 1983, p.7).

Hochschild, when describing emotional labour, distinguished between 'surface acting' and 'deep acting'. Surface acting involves behavioural compliance with the display rules without any attempt to internalise these, the result being that employees often feel 'fake' or 'phoney'. By contrast, deep acting internalises the role so that teachers act in accordance with their feelings. Hochschild had an essentially negative depiction of emotional labour, which may not fit the emotional labour that teachers actually do. The more positive aspects of

emotional labour need further exploration (Simpson and Smith, 2006).

Furthermore, within teaching the displayed emotions are often consistent with how they are feeling, therefore teachers are not merely surface acting but engaged in 'sincere emotion giving' (Hargreaves 1994; Fineman, 1993; Robson and Bailey, 2009; Wharton, 2009). It is also the case that teachers may not be engaged in emotional labour in the same way as other employees. Workers in professions have been described as 'privileged emotion managers' (Orzechowicz, 1998). Part of their training is in techniques of emotion management (for example through reflective journals) and they have more resources to support them whilst in the job than workers in other areas. Further, it is argued that professionals' emotional labour is given recognition and support by peers to a greater degree than those working in the service industry (Orzechowicz, 1998).

A complicating factor when reviewing the research is that emotion management and emotional labour are operationalized differently in different studies, making comparisons between pieces of research difficult to draw. More broadly, research on emotional labour and emotions generally has been accused of being solipsistic, with a focus on individual experience at the expense of an examination of the influence of social structures (Burman, 2009). Bearing these caveats in mind, the next section will attempt an overview of the existing literature on teaching and emotional labour and emotion work.

iii. *Passion and caring*

Since Hochschild's research, there has been a focus on the beneficial aspects of emotions within teaching. The work of Hargreaves (1998) focuses on the role of positive emotions, particularly passion, as being central to teachers' roles:

Teaching is not simply about knowing your subject...good teachers are not just well-oiled machines. They are emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy (p.835).

These more positive affective experiences are highlighted by Hebson *et al.*'s interviews with teachers which demonstrated the way that the more pleasurable emotional aspects of their work are ignored within research, such as the relationships with pupils (2006, 2007). (See also Pugliesi, 1999; Sutton and Wheatley, 2003; and Wharton, 2009, on the empowering aspects of emotional labour and how not all care giving in the workplace is exploitative: providing care may be emotionally satisfying and intrinsically rewarding.) Many studies report positive consequences for employees from interactions with others (quoted in Wharton, 2009) and even deep acting, defined as an attempt to truly feel the emotions one is expected to show, has been demonstrated to positively affect workers by increasing their sense of accomplishment. It seems that those who engage in deep acting or genuinely experience these emotions seem

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able to resist the negative consequences of emotional labour such as burnout and stress.

iv. Rewards, 'making a difference' and 'the little things'

It should be noted that there are methodological problems with the body of literature in this area; 'rewards' are not static and they may change over time, and therefore a longitudinal approach is needed to see how rewards develop and change for those working in schools. Despite these methodological limitations, some research has examined the possible dimensions of 'making a difference' and its relationship to rewards in teaching.

In order to teach effectively, it is argued that teachers need to know that they are 'making a difference' in the lives of children they are teaching and that those children are learning (although the definition of 'making a difference' often goes unexplored). Rudow (1999) notes that teachers need to feel wanted and important, and require affirmation of this by those they live and work with.

In this light, Day *et al.* (2007) explored the more personal factors that impacted on teachers' work by interviewing them about their motivation, well-being, and commitment and stress levels. Half of teachers gave 'working with children' as the reason for their motivation for becoming a teacher, whilst almost a quarter gave 'making a difference to children's lives' as their reason (although the idea of 'making a difference' remained somewhat unexplored in the research (Day *et*

al., 2007)). Most teachers stated that those reasons still applied to them later in their career, although motivation did decrease over time.

'Making a difference' was the most common reason given (by 57 per cent of the 309 teachers) for choosing teaching as a career (Day *et al.*, 2007). Primary teachers' responses were largely focused on working with children, the fact that they had always wanted to be a teacher, and the impact of their job on children's lives. For example, Phoebe (Year 6) said that she wanted to be 'part of the development of children' so that she could help in their future careers; and Carmelle (Year 2) reported wanting to be a teacher 'in order to make a difference in children's lives' (Day *et al.*, 2007, p. 220). It was also felt that being a teacher meant playing a part in addressing some of the social inequalities to which pupils were exposed. For 51 per cent of the primary teachers, their pupils remained the main sources of their job satisfaction, together with the ability to contribute to their all round education.

Over half (52 per cent) of the participating secondary teachers also gave responses in this category. Like the primary teachers, their responses also focused on giving pupils 'the best start in life' (Day *et al.*, 2007, p. 220) and allowing pupils to benefit academically and socially:

I really wanted to be a teacher so that I would be doing something that made a difference to someone. (Shaun, Year 9., in Day *et al.*, 2007, p. 220).

In Day *et al.*'s study, notwithstanding the negative comments that respondents made, teachers continued to find satisfaction from their work in spite of government policies (Day *et al.*, 2007). For example, Nancy (Year 6) spoke of 'the spark of hope with children when you know you've made a difference- despite the inclusion policy' (p. 139). Similarly, the sample reported that 'I can make a difference to what children think and learn' (Day *et al.*, 2007, p. 147).

What kept the majority of teachers committed to teaching and learning were their core values, such as their 'desire to make a difference to children's learning' (Larissa, Year 6, Day *et al.*, 2007, p.147). It was the satisfaction gained from working with pupils that kept them in teaching despite pressures from policy initiatives, the challenges of pupil behaviour, parental pressure and excessive workloads.

Teachers also wanted to 'make a difference in pupils' learning' (Ivan, Year 9, mathematics). Stella (Year 9, English) had always wanted to 'work with pupils, care for them and make a difference in their lives'. Isaac (Year 9, mathematics) remained 'absolutely and utterly committed to making a difference in social and academic terms' and for Stella too (Year 9, English):

What keeps me motivated is that I'm making a difference in kids' lives. If I wasn't doing that, then my motivation would go. (Day *et al.*, 2007, p. 158.)

This sense of vocation is an important professional asset of teachers (Day *et al.*, 2007). It is the underpinning of teachers' personal resources with 'determination, courage and flexibility, qualities that are in turn buoyed by the disposition to regard teaching as something more than a job, to which one has something significant to offer' (Hansen, 1995, p. 12). One teacher in Day *et al.*'s study had deliberately joined his school to make a difference to students from socio-economically deprived backgrounds, and some staff had a strong calling to teach since childhood and continued to enjoy the pleasure of working with children in their current schools.

Hansen (1995) argues that in contrast to a profession which has an emphasis on public recognition and larger rewards, the language of vocation 'takes us 'inward' into the core of the (teaching) practice itself', that is, 'what many teachers do, and why they do it' (1995, p.8). This was the case for many teachers in Day *et al.*'s research. Pupils' progress had clearly stayed at the heart of their strong sense of vocation, or sense of mission. Some staff also saw their mission in terms of redemption, where previously negative experiences at school are put to use in ensuring that pupils have a better experience, which is fulfilling for the staff concerned (Watson, 2009).

Kitching, Morgan and O'Leary (2009) argue that it is 'the little things' in teaching that bring the most rewards to staff. In particular, teachers' diaries of what was called Affect Triggering Incidents (ATIs) revealed that student engagement in classroom tasks and student achievement were the biggest factors in engendering positive feelings in teachers. It was not big life events or critical

incidents which had the most impact on teachers, but routine, everyday moments which increase and maintain motivation to teach. Weaker students who made particular progress were a source of great satisfaction.

v. *Difficult emotions*

O'Connor's study (2008) highlighted the importance to respondents of caring, but also demonstrated the negative aspects of emotional labour and how relationships with other colleagues could be difficult and draining. Policy reform has also led to emotional consequences for teachers, who have experienced time pressures, strong negative emotional experiences and a related loss of self-esteem (van Veen *et al.*, 2005; Hargreaves, 1994; Woods, 2001). Teachers often found these emotions hard to manage, as expressions of such strong feelings were felt to be unprofessional and inappropriate (Hargreaves, 2005; Winograd, 2003; Sachs and Blakemore, 1998) and often led to a reluctance to accept and respond to change, particularly if they had been teaching for a long time (Hargreaves, 2005). It is the pressure to hide emotions that appears to cause emotional exhaustion for staff (Wharton, 2009; Isenbarger and Zembylas, 2006).

More recently, MacBeath *et al.*'s study (2006) is one of the few to explicitly discuss the emotional nature of teaching in SEN and recognise that '[T]eaching takes place both in the heart and the head. It is both a cerebral and emotional activity...it is the heart that more often rules the head' (MacBeath *et al.*, 2006 p. 14). Teachers often felt guilt and failure when working with children

with SEN. MacBeath *et al.*'s study found that teachers felt guilt about letting children down by not giving them enough time or seeing very slow progress. Teachers felt that they were 'muddling through' (p. 33) and they were constantly weighing up the satisfaction felt through their commitment to the children with the stress that the job engendered. Staff spoke of the 'hell' that they had to go through before feeling a sense of achievement with pupils, especially those with challenging behaviour and complex needs (MacBeath *et al.*, 2006 p.33).

vi. *Emotion work, emotional labour and methodological issues*

Chapter 5 discusses the methodological approach of this study in more detail and this next section will briefly outline why this particular approach was adopted. It was decided to use a life history/narrative approach to studying emotions, particularly because this is an approach that had been taken by previous researchers (Kelchtermans, 2009 and Sikes, 2006, for example). Within the narrative approach, interviews and focus groups were utilised, as these were seen as appropriate ways to elicit the emotions employed when teaching and those which drive the reasons for beginning (and staying) in teaching (see Chapter 11 for a critique of this approach).

As has been noted later on in this chapter, teaching is essentially a personal job, being comprised of the relationships with others: teachers and students and teachers and other teachers (Sikes, 2006). Emotions are fundamental to the job and cannot be separated from it (Nias, 1996; Sikes, 2006). At the same time, the influence being a teacher has on the life outside of school, on relationships with

family, friends and the community is also significant and can be uncovered by narrative research. Teaching gives rise to issues of personal commitment and vulnerability, emotions which it is argued are best explored by taking a personal, biographical approach (Kelchtermans, 2009) and this approach to researching emotions has a long history.

Research on teaching has become increasingly influenced by developments in psychology, particularly how teachers organise their thinking and feeling (Kelchtermans, 2009). As narrative is the discourse structure in which human actions become meaningful, narrative enquiry is a 'powerful way to unravel and understand the complex processes of sense-making that constitute teaching' (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 260). Storytelling is a natural way that people make sense of life events, situations and emotions, and the study of narrative is therefore the study of how we understand the world (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). A narrative approach also allows the non-technical dimensions of being teachers, such as emotions and emotion work, to be conceptualised and discussed (Kelchtermans, 2009).

Due to its suitability to research the affective dimensions of teachers' work, autobiographical and narrative research approaches are increasingly being used in educational research (Sikes, 2006). To understand social life, and emotions as an aspect of this, research is increasingly taking a narrative approach. This rise in popularity is mirrored by a deepening interest in popular culture generally in the psychological, personal and emotional as parts of people's lives. Life history, through different forms of interviews, can provide a

depth and richness of information on the emotional life that other methodologies cannot (Sikes, 2006), and the research findings are also interesting and accessible, allowing for a meaningful connection with readers. Research subjects are people with lives, feelings and emotions like everyone else, and life history can help to illuminate and develop critical understandings of these lives and help us to question taken for granted assumptions. In this way, the method is ideally suited to studying the emotions. Life history can also illuminate the tensions between personal desires and institutional expectations over time, and this is explored particularly in Chapter 11.

Life history, by examining emotions, can give a voice to the feelings and personal voice of those marginalised in the profession such as teachers of children with SEN, and helps to give an antidote to dominant images of teachers within culture, particularly the trend to portraying teachers in 'managerial' terms (Goodson, 1992; Munro, 1991).

However, although the method is ideal for studying the emotions, this brings with it some dangers. Painful areas and experiences may be touched on or evoked, however ostensibly neutral the topic. The problematic aspects of this approach, particularly the dangers of life history turning into a personal-confessional narrative, and the importance of the distinction between life history interviewing and counselling, are also explored in Chapter 11.

Within a narrative approach, group interviews are a useful strategy for this kind of research (Sikes, 2006) and focus group interviews were used in this study.

The success of this approach depends largely on the dynamics between participants and this can be largely down to chance (see Chapter 11 for further exploration of this).

In summary, research on teachers' emotions has a substantial history and it is increasing in significance as the affective dimensions of teachers' work are valued as a subject of research. Mirroring this research and to effectively uncover and explore teachers' emotions, a narrative life history approach will be taken using individual and group interviews. This approach will be explored below.

Narrative enquiry

i. Narrative enquiry in educational research

This thesis took a narrative inquiry approach. According to Clandinin and Connelly,

...narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An enquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experience that make up people's lives, both

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individual and social. Simply stated...narrative inquiry is stories lived and told (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.20).

Life history can be seen as 'sociologically read biography' (Bertaux, 1981, p. 209). The popularity of auto/biography is that it is a form of 'licensed voyeurism' into the lives of others (Measor and Sikes, 1992, p. 209), which brings its own challenges, to be addressed later in this thesis. The approach uses qualitative techniques, especially the unstructured or semi-structured interview, which provides interviewees with the opportunity of telling their own stories in their own ways. This helps in the reconstruction and interpretation of meaningful features and critical incidences in an individual's life (Hitchcock and Hughes, p. 186).

A life story is the 'life as told' by the person who lived and experienced the life. Life history goes further, however, and occurs when the storyteller and researcher collaborate to produce an intertextual and contextual account (Goodson, 1992, p. 236). Life history attempts to account for historical context, despite the fear that the researcher will impose their own meaning on the life story (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p.17). This means that there are four levels to the research: the life as lived, the life as experienced; the life as told, and the life history.

Through life histories, it is possible to build up a mosaic-like picture of the individual and the events and people that surround them so that possible relations, influences and patterns can be observed. This enables the researcher

to explore processes over time and adds historical depth to subsequent analyses (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989).

Despite the strengths of a life history approach, research on the personal, biographical and historical aspects of teaching is still underdeveloped, although it has seen greater popularity in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Measor and Sikes, 1992; Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989) and more recently in the work of Day *et al.* (2007).

Despite this renaissance, teacher educators and student teachers have not received as much attention as subjects of research (Grundy and Hatton, 1998) and this dissertation is an attempt to rectify this neglect. The complex ways in which teachers' biographies shape their taken-for-granted understandings of 'being a teacher' are unrecognised and unacknowledged. This may also have implications for the sort of understandings that are being made available to teacher education students.

In particular, the influence of postmodernism, and the consequent movement from objectivities to subjectivities, has opened up new avenues for life history work. What was seen as its lack of representativeness and subjective nature became to be seen as its strength (Munro, 1998 p. 8). The relative neglect of life histories, especially in the area of staff working with children with SEN, was one of the reasons that I decided to follow this line of enquiry.

Life history still has a marginal position in educational research in comparison to more systematic forms of observation, experiment, hypothesis testing and research and surveys. There has been relatively little written on the theoretical and epistemological framework for life history (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989, p. 192).

When assessing the advantages of a life history approach, Goodson argues that life history is crucial to an understanding of teaching, as 'in understanding something so intensely personal as teaching, it is critical we know about the person the teacher is' (Goodson, 1992, p. 234). In their accounts about school in this dissertation, teachers constantly referred to personal and biographical influences on their career. According to Nias, 'the self is a crucial element in the way teachers themselves construe the nature of their job' (Nias, 1989, p.13).

Professional practices are therefore embedded in wider life concerns (Goodson, 1992). What goes on inside classrooms is closely related to what goes on in teachers' lives outside the classroom (Hargreaves, 1997). The way that teachers teach is also grounded in their backgrounds, their biographies, and in the kinds of teachers they have become (Rich, 2004). Life history is informative in its own right, but also plays a role in furthering understanding of a wide range of topics concerning education and schooling and can link teachers' stories to social and political developments (Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Goodson and Numan, 2002).

Life history can also highlight the much neglected emotional aspects of teachers' selves (Day and Leitch, 2001) and this was an area that I particularly wanted to concentrate upon (see Chapter 8). Professional lives are linked to personal lives, particularly by the emotional aspects of teaching highlighted by teachers when discussing their work, such as 'commitment', 'care', 'courage' and 'compromise' (Day and Leitch, 2001, p. 414). There is a delicate interaction between the rational (cognitive) and the non-rational (emotional).

Therefore, the decision to be a teacher reflects how teachers see themselves in a personal, more emotional way. The decision to be a teacher is not just the choice between one job or another; it is rather a 'choice of personhood' (Pomson, 2004, p. 648). Teachers' personal and professional lives merge, and even when teachers are not in paid employment (for example when raising small children) they tend to still see themselves as 'teachers'. A teaching career is not a chronological chain of events, positions and roles, but a lens through which a person sees themselves as a whole. Life history research is uniquely positioned to capture this interaction between a teachers' emotional life and their job role.

iii. Distance and closeness: constructing field texts

As part of the narrative process, field texts were constructed. Field texts helped me to move back and forth between full involvement with participants and distance from them. Field texts assist memory to fill in the richness, nuance, and intimacy of the lived stories (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). My experience

as a narrative researcher was a dual one. I was experiencing the experience but also being part of the experience itself. It was important to be fully involved yet also step back and see my own stories in the inquiry, and the stories of the participants. The level of distance was co-constructed by the inquirer and participants, and was sometimes close, and sometimes more distant: the relationships were negotiable. Being in the field allowed intimacy, whereas composing and reading field texts allowed one to slip out of intimacy for a time. The field text allowed this (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The field texts enabled me to observe remembered events, as they were more complex than memory alone was likely to construct. However, it should be borne in mind that field texts were only one version of events, and there was no one true version of events.

Life histories may be fragmented and full of disconnected traces that may never tie up neatly. However, this did not prevent me from coming to an interpretation; I recognise that this account was one of many that could be made (Scott, 1998). There was the danger of imposing categories: I had ideas myself about what I would find, although I did try to ensure that the categories emerged from the data (see Analysis section, Chapter 6).

It was also important to take notes on my inner experiences of events: the experience of the experience. I recorded these notes in a reflective journal. In this way, the field notes were turned outwards, and the journal reflections were turned inwards (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). A reflective journal was kept between 2006 and 2011, and this aided me in my reflections on the interviews. I

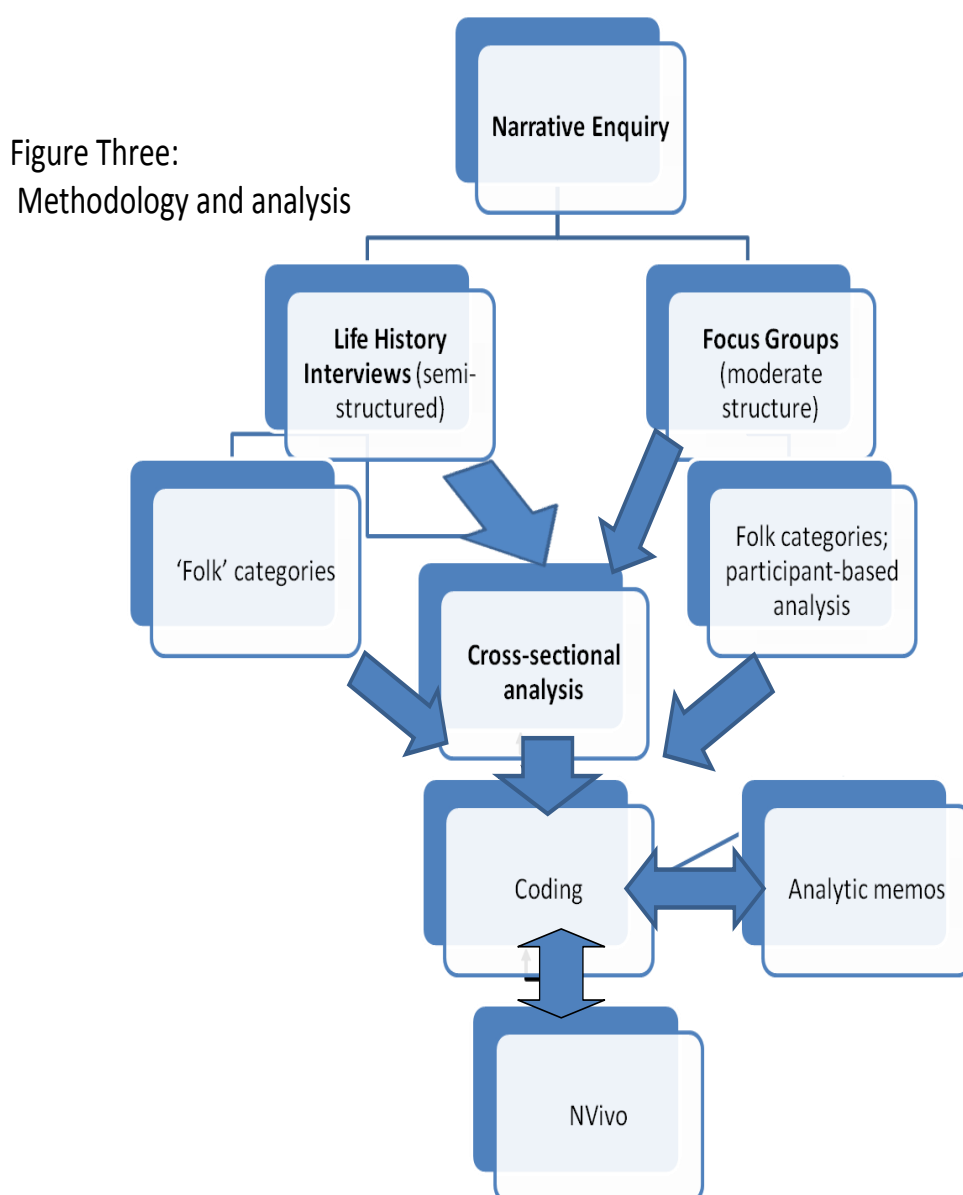
took some notes during the interviews and the role of field texts will be explored in the next chapter.

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As part of the narrative enquiry, focus groups and life history interviews were used. The methodology section will now explore the usage of these methods and how they fit within a narrative enquiry approach.

CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGY

Figure Three: Methodology and analysis



Introduction

Evidence of the progress of teachers' careers was investigated by the use of four focus groups, one of which was a pilot study with a group of TAs. Following on shortly after the focus groups, semi-structured life history interviews were carried out with 12 respondents (these respondents were different to those in

the focus group; see Chapter 4 for an outline of the life history method). Additionally, one TA took part in a pilot life history interview (p.76). The total sample size (excluding the pilot sample) was 32. There was no overlap between the respondents in the focus groups and the interview respondents. The study used an opportunity sample based on responses to an advert placed in two national magazines for teachers of children with SEN, the magazine of a teacher union, a personal letter to all SENCOs in an inner London borough, and an electronic request that went to all students in the university in which the author was working. The respondents were geographically spread throughout England with the exception that there were no participants from the north-east.

A decision was taken to remove the responses from the TAs from the final analysis. Their experiences were significantly different to the SENCOs (particularly their one-to-one work with children and relations with other staff). I therefore felt it was more fruitful to explore these issues separately (see Mackenzie, 2011c). However, I recognise that their presence in a focus group will have influenced the direction of discussion and the direction of the focus group; for example, in one group, the difference between the TA's role and that of the SENCO was discussed, and the differences in the respective respondents' understandings of SEN were featured. In addition, the TA pilot focus group and interview helped to determine the research questions (see p. 77-78 on the pilot). However, none of the TA interview or focus group responses, including the pilot results, have been included in the main analysis.

The focus group samples were geographically clustered to allow ease of attendance at focus group meetings. Three groups were in London and one was in the Midlands. The research was funded by the Promising Researcher grant from my university and the data collection took place over 10 months in 2007. Focus groups were used partly as a way of enabling participants to raise initial ideas that could then also be explored via semi-structured interviews (this was particularly true of the TA pilot focus group and the pilot TA interview: see page 77). The questions that emerged were therefore as far as possible derived directly from the respondents' discussion rather than from my own preconceptions. From the discussions, questions emerged around when participants began working with children with SEN, what motivated them to work in SEN, why they stayed, whether they had thought of leaving, the qualities they thought were important to working in SEN, and what critical incidents or events had led to their decision to begin to work in this area. Focus groups were also useful to enable a relatively large sample to be accessed at one time. The participants could also talk in a relatively relaxed and open manner - the groups were run using the 'funnel' technique so that relatively broad questions were asked at the start to warm the group up (such as what job they were currently doing), whereas more probing questions were asked later, such as the particular life events that had motivated them into working with children with SEN. All participants were asked to complete a consent form and were issued with an information sheet for the project. Respondents were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the project at any point (see the section on ethical issues, p. 119).

The respondents were all volunteers which may mean that they were perhaps more motivated to working in SEN than in other groups, or had more positive or negative (or at any rate more intense) experiences than other teachers. Therefore, questions can be raised about how representative the sample is; it could be hypothesised that those less motivated to work in SEN or who 'drifted into it' would not volunteer to take part in the research. The sample had worked from between one and over thirty years as teachers with responsibility for children with SEN (Appendix i).

Table 1: Length of time working as a SENCO

Length of experience as a SENCO (years)	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-19	20+
Number of SENCOS	2	11	6	5	9

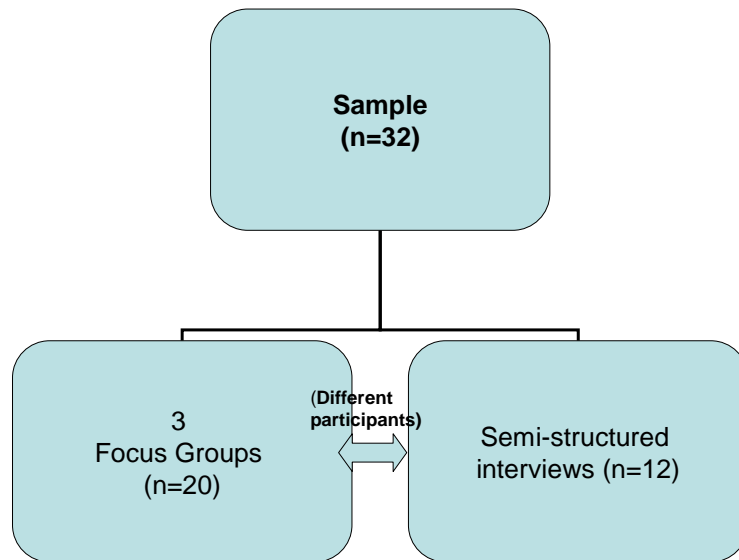


Figure 4: SENCO and teacher sample (n=32)

To judge the socio-economic composition of the schools in the sample, a proxy measure was used (percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)) (Appendix i). The national average of pupils eligible for free school meals was 16% in 2007. The London average was 26% eligibility, with the inner London average being 37%. One school was non-maintained and therefore no pupils were eligible for FSM. Data for each individual school was not always available, and in those cases the local authority average was used.

Therefore, the majority of the sample was working in schools with above average levels of FSM. This partly reflects the number of respondents based in London (23). It is recognised that the sample may not have been representative, given that most respondents were working in London and were

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female and were working in schools with higher than average levels of FSM. It is possible to hypothesise that working in such schools may have led to more intense emotional experiences than in other schools, although this could not be explored within the boundaries of this project.

Some basic quantitative data was collected on the participants' experiences (see Chapters 7 to 10). It is recognised that the sample is too small to apply any statistical analysis or infer any causal relationships between variables; although the tables do offer some interesting insights (see the relevant findings chapters).

The pilot study

i. Pilot interview

The first interview was undertaken with a graduate student with a history of working with children with special needs, who was currently working as a TA. The pilot illustrated some practical issues (the respondent had to break off in the middle of the interview to fill the parking meter) but more importantly, some initial problems with my questions. The respondent's childhood and early teaching illustrated why she decided to go into teaching children with special needs, but the transcript demonstrated that I had failed to follow these experiences up in sufficient depth. In addition, the time constraints (an hour) and the superficiality of some of the questions did not lead to the respondent being able to go into depth about her experiences and future career choice. I found that spending a lot of time on earlier, warm-up questions, in an attempt to

establish rapport, did not leave enough time for sufficient coverage of the relevant issues. It became clear reading the transcript that emotional issues were significant to this respondent (for example her own childhood experiences and their influence on her career decisions, together with her desire to 'make a difference') and this helped to form the future research questions. The respondent also displayed some anxieties about her responses, perhaps around me being her former lecturer, and asked at several points 'is that what you wanted?'

I resolved to remedy this in future interviews by concentrating less on the earlier, opening questions, and to try to probe more the reasoning behind working with children with SEN, without adopting too much of an interrogatory stance. I also removed the ranking exercise and vignettes (Appendix vi) as they did not appear to engage the respondents or add anything of particular interest to the study and so were time-consuming to no obvious benefit.

ii. Pilot focus group

A pilot focus group was used with students from my university; using a convenience /opportunity sample of those who planned to work with children with SEN (they were all working as teaching assistants at the time). The students were drawn from the undergraduate degree programmes in the School of Education. The pilot enabled me to test the focus group interview guide and to evaluate the most appropriate number of participants and also the length of time required to obtain rich and meaningful data. Data from the teaching

assistants was not used in this final dissertation as their focus, concerns and experiences diverged from the other respondents.

Some problems emerged with the focus group: it was very difficult to get respondents together at the same time and so obtaining a suitable date was time-consuming. One particular member dominated the discussion and so I learnt strategies to try and engage more participants in the group (for example by using positive body language and looking at quieter members to encourage them to contribute). In addition, some initial warm-up activities did not work well in developing relevant discussion and so these were abandoned for future focus groups (see Appendix vi for examples of these activities). As before, the pilot transcript made it clear that the emotional aspects of their work were most significant (the influence of childhood; the significance of the country of heritage; relationships with parents; relationships with colleagues; and 'making a difference') and so these issues informed the development of the research questions. The pilot interview and focus group, together with the reading for the literature review, indicated that the emotional aspects of teaching, and the emotion work that teachers undertook, explained why they began (and stayed) teaching children with SEN.

Next stages – post-pilot

As the interviews and focus groups progressed, the emotional aspects of teaching and the idea of 'making a difference' emerged as a motivating factor for working with children with SEN, and this became one of the issues that was

explored further with the groups/interviews once I was sensitised to it (Chapter 9). In this way, the pilot study was useful in highlighting issues I had not previously considered in depth.

The vignettes did not create much discussion (see Appendix vi for examples of vignettes). The vignettes were not seen as particularly accurate descriptions of SENCOs. The respondents took such different paths to working in SEN that they could not identify with the fictional cases, and the pilot student focus group did not comment much due to lack of experience of working in the school with SENCOs and did not feel able to expand on why other people might enter the profession.

The interview questions did change subsequent to the pilot (to include, for example, prompts to sensitise me to listen out for phrases such as 'making a difference'). It was also clear from the transcripts that there were gaps in my questioning, and so the following questions were added (see the Appendix for the full question list):

- i. What do you remember about your first year of teaching?
- ii. Why do you stay in teaching?
- iii. What does 'making a difference' mean? and
- iv. Questions on resilience- why stay? Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

I also followed Woods (1986) in trying to focus on finding 'critical periods' of the first six months of teaching; three years after starting one's first job; and mid-

career promotion. The questions also focused on themes such as 'negative reaction to teacher training'; influence of headteacher and head of department; concern over status of self and profession; and strong links between 'self' and subject. I asked questions around this i.e. what does it mean to you to be a 'special needs teacher'? Who influenced you in your work? Has anyone been particularly encouraging? I attempted to focus on influencers, mentors, role models, gatekeepers, critical incidents or turning points (Woods, 1986).

I asked more about reasons for taking up teaching in the first place (Woods, 1986) and also the following: Any 'chance' elements in your career, rather than intentional decisions? Do you see your involvement in teaching as a vocation rather than just a job? Did you teach because it suited you as a person? How important is special needs to you? Or do other aspects of the job predominate? What advice would you give new teachers? What 'coping' or survival strategies do you have?

As an ice-breaker, I asked more general questions, such as: How do you see yourself as a teacher? Has that changed over the core of your teaching career? What sort of special needs teacher are you? How essential is 'special educational needs' to your personal identity? Briefly articulate your philosophy of teaching; how has it changed over your teaching career?

The interviews and focus groups then progressed using these amended questions.

The next section will describe the narrative enquiry approach that was taken and explore the role of interviews and focus groups within this.

Narrative enquiry and its limitations

i. Uses and limitations

It became clear after noting the limitations of the pilot research that a narrative approach would be useful in uncovering the emotions involved in the decisions to begin and remain teaching children with SEN. This is not a mainstream method, however, and despite its significance for understanding teaching, it has been suggested that studying teachers' lives will never become mainstream, as it aims to give a voice to an occupational group that has been marginalised in the past (Goodson, 1992). Life history research has been utilised particularly by feminists, who have attempted to recover the 'lost voices' of such marginalised women and allow the subject to speak for herself (see for example Munro, 1998). Life histories can be collaborative and reciprocal processes, and also empowering and transformative (Munro, 1998).

I was concerned however that life history romanticises the individual, and has been criticized as a form of narcissism or navel-gazing. The focus on the individual has been accused of deflecting attention away from structural inequalities such as racism and sexism, for example (Munro, 1998). (Although my respondents did on occasion discuss their ideas in a wider social context, especially linking the experiences of children with SEN with socio-economic disadvantage.)

It was also not possible to 'collect' a life (Munro ,1998 p. 12) as participants experience different dimensions of their lives and do not have neat, chronological accounts. It was only possible to obtain a snapshot of a life in progress when writing up life history research (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). A single interpretation of a life history was impossible, and undesirable; I did not want to impose one final interpretation on the narratives (Munro, 1998). I was also acutely aware that despite this desire to avoid a totalising narrative, I was imposing my own meaning on the life history, through the selection of transcript extracts, for example.

Life histories meant that I was always at one step removed from the lives under study, and I had to interpret accounts on the basis of what had been related by the participants. Participants will construct their narratives within particular moments in time and these accounts are inevitably discursive constructions and fictions of a kind (Munro, 1998). Because the interviews are reconstructions of a life, they can never recapture the original experience. They are subject to the accuracy of memory, and the ability (and willingness) of respondents to recapture the experience accurately. I became aware that in some cases, respondents had not considered the issue under question before and were finding it difficult to recall their reasons for entering the profession which perhaps led to the construction of 'semi-fictional' accounts to enable the participants to answer the questions (see Chapter 11 for more discussion of this issue).

In addition, my initial presumptions and hunches may have turned out to be incorrect, and so I always tried to be open to the possibility that I was imposing my own meaning on the participants' life histories. Munro, for example, did not find much evidence for women teachers' conscious perception of themselves as political radicals, contrary to her expectations, and they refused to see themselves as victims of gender oppression within teaching (Munro, 1998). In this way, if initial themes were identified too early, they may subsequently have influenced the rest of the research process, and so I tried to allow the main themes to emerge throughout the participants' responses rather than predetermine them from the start. Respondents were aware that I was looking at why people want to work with children with SEN, and therefore may have spent some time considering a 'narrative' in advance although it is of course difficult to know if this was the case. I suspect for one respondent in particular, a well-rehearsed story was being told and a polished narrative was recounted. I was wary of not trying to impose my own thoughts on the process (i.e. trying not to lead respondents towards discussing a 'care' discourse of SEN (Chapter 7)) but I did feel that, in the pilot, the examples of SENCO qualities that I asked them to rank (see Appendix vi) reflected my own thoughts about the kinds of qualities one might have, and indeed, several of the respondents queried why I had chosen those particular qualities and questioned the accuracy and validity of the characteristics.

ii. *The construction of meaning*

Empathy between me as a researcher and the respondent was an essential ingredient in the research, due to the highly collaborative nature of the activity (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). Life histories are seen as the joint production of the researcher and the respondent (although this may be problematic, as will be addressed later).

It was important to develop a dialogue between the respondent and myself, as well as the subjects with themselves. The resulting data was very rich, evocative, highly localized and subjective (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). Researchers have differed in the degree to which they have edited, ordered and reassembled such narrative materials; I wanted the subject's voice to come through intact in the final writing. However, I found problems in trying to capture 'voice': in particular, the editing process did appear to make some of the respondents' thoughts appear to be disjointed and 'chopped up' (see Analysis, Chapter 6).

The features of life history research suggest that the role of the interview/conversation is very different to other kinds of interview. Interviewing is generally unstructured, meaning that considerable freedom can be given to the subjects to respond and talk in ways they wanted about the issues they wanted to, prompted by the researcher's general concerns (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). For example, Nias used a few open questions, and listed single words on postcards as an aide-memoir to ensure that all the relevant ground

was covered during the interview (Nias, 2001). Conversations enabled the interviewee to introduce subjects, materials or themes as they saw fit, which to a large extent determined the nature of the interview itself. I took a fairly structured approach to asking open questions, although I did change questions where appropriate and prompted where necessary, and in some cases I did not get through my questions as the participants took the interview down a divergent path. Although on occasions this led to the collection of data that was not used, taking a flexible approach to questioning helped the respondents to find their 'voice' and in some cases it helped a greater rapport to develop.

iii. Preliminary issues: questioning, relationships, 'preunderstandings'

Collecting life histories is largely reliant upon good will, and so it was important to make adequate and effective prior arrangements. It was also important to have a reasonably clear idea of the kinds of questions that would be asked and the general areas in which information and ideas would be sought (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). I had constructed a schedule of broad, open questions, which were followed up by prompts and other questions where relevant (see Appendix v) and this was informed by the pilot study.

It is important that in narrative research, a close, sympathetic and understanding relationship with the subject is built up. Status differences between me and the respondent needed to be considered. There was a danger that the gap between my participant's narratives of experience and mine may have been too big, and they may not have connected with one another

(Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). This did happen in one case where there was a particularly large age-gap between myself and the respondent, and my own negative feelings about her responses (which I perceived to reflect a 'medical' model of SEN), may have led to a lack of rapport and a somewhat short and superficial interview.

The researcher-participant relationship was a tenuous one, always in the midst of being negotiated. The relationship also had a sense of temporariness, as the working relationship came to an end eventually. It was a strange experience taking leave of my participants after they had been so open about their experiences over such a short space of time, and it was disconcerting to consider that I might not meet them again (although subsequent contact has been made through e-mail and telephone). The ending of the interviews appeared to be a little sudden, given the (relatively) personal nature of the preceding encounters.

The status gap was a particular issue when interviewing TAs in the pilot group, some of whom were recent graduates. Some asked afterwards 'if that was OK?', as if it was being assessed in the same way as a piece of coursework. The student-lecturer barrier may also have inhibited them from being as open as they might have been about their feelings about inclusion, although this barrier appeared to lessen during the life of the first focus group when students became more open and relaxed as the group progressed.

Most importantly, the relationship between the participants constantly needed to be worked at. Part of this was continually explaining what I was trying to do. This was not always easy, as it was not always totally clear what the purpose of the research was, as the focus of the research changed slightly over time (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). In particular, the focus of the interviews did shift somewhat to focus more on the participants' personal motivations and to cut down on some of the irrelevant questions which were too time-consuming and detracted from the purpose of the research.

The way I acted, questioned and responded in an interview shaped the relationship and therefore the ways participants respond and give accounts of their experience. The conditions under which the interviews took place also shaped the interview, such as the place, the time of day, and the degree of formality established. The first six interviews took place at the university in which I work, and were carried out in lecture rooms, and may therefore have added to the formality of the interviews. It is possible that interviewing subsequent participants in their own workplaces or homes had an effect on the type of responses that were given although it is not clear in what ways. One notable difference was that these interviews were longer, suggesting that respondents were more at ease in these situations.

I also had my own 'preunderstandings' of events, and these need to be explored. The temptation was to understand the life history data only in terms of what I wanted to understand (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989; Nias 1999). My main problem here was that I had decided beforehand what some of the main

issues were. Although I attempted to be guided by the respondents' answers, in particular in the pilot, I was very much driven by my list of topics/questions. I asked respondents at the end of the interview if there was anything which they wished to ask but most did not add anything immediately, perhaps due to tiredness. Interestingly, both the focus groups and the interviewees were keen to talk at great length after the recording apparatus was turned off: about the research, their lives, school, studying, and so on. However, this material has been omitted due to the lack of recording and also ethical issues i.e. the respondents were not aware that this material might be used.

iv. Data collection/Composing field texts

The preconceptions I had about the inquiry may have influenced what was selected from the field texts. It may be possible that I deliberately selected some aspects of the data that turned up in field texts. Foregrounding one or other aspects had the danger that other aspects may be less visible or even not visible at all (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). In addition, field notes may not have captured the entire context, such as body language, or facial expression, even though the conversation was digitally recorded. Trying to note non-verbal aspects whilst interviewing was occasionally difficult; respondents found my writing to be off-putting at times, and so I was sometimes reliant on memory when considering respondents' non-verbal communication. This aspect of communication was much easier to examine in the focus groups, where I had a research assistant to note down features such as body language, demeanour, and engagement and so on (although this was obviously dependent upon the

perceptiveness of her own observations, which I cannot wholly corroborate, and so may be unreliable).

Within an interview, I selected the moment to turn the digital recorder on, selected questions to be asked, and picked up on some participants responses by responding to them in certain ways, such as by smiling, asking questions that seem relevant at that moment, or by asking for clarification. Because of my body responses, the participant may have responded with more detail, or change the response. And, in a restricted amount of time, some points remained unexplored. In this way the field text was shaped by the selective interest of me, or the participant, or both. What may appear as an objective recording of a structured interview was already an interpretative and contextualized text. It was interpretive, as it was shaped by the interpretive processes of the participant and myself and our relationship, and contextualized due to the circumstances of my origins and settings (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). In addition, the choice of material to use afterwards also reflected my own interpretations, which may or may not have been those of the respondent.

Field texts were routinely and rigorously kept, and were necessary to fill in the spaces created by memory. Field texts therefore were as detailed as possible. They were also complimented by journal entries on research responses. One issue was the time lag between the interviews and the completion of the transcripts (sometimes three months) which meant that the freshness of my interpretations of the interviews was lost to a certain degree and so the field texts became important in filling the gaps.

A practical issue when moving from field texts to research texts was that of moving away from the close contact with the participants, and reading and re-reading the field texts and beginning to compose research texts (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The focus then shifted to retelling the stories through research texts. At this stage, it was tempting to let the field notes stand as they were, as they were interesting. However, I could not stop there: it was crucial to find meaning in the texts. Field texts needed to be reconstructed as research texts.

The volume of field texts was overwhelming, and it was difficult to deal with such a huge volume of data, an issue that was partly be solved by the use of NVivo (see Chapter 6). Nias similarly found that teachers' willingness, and desire, to talk at great length about their lives as teachers, led to a huge volume to data being gathered, with subsequent issues of what data to select (Nias, 1991). Again, there were problems here of the delay between the interview and the text; this lead to a distancing process, and the possibility of misremembering the context of the interviews, and forgetting which factors were significant at the time. I was aided in this by field notes. However, the transcripts were verbatim, which captured what was said, even if some nuances of non-verbal communication may have been missed.

Before analysing the field texts, it was important to know what information there was, which meant reading and re-reading them all and doing some preliminary sorting. I spent many hours reading and re-reading field texts in order to construct a chronicled or summarized account of what was contained within

them. This often led to a sense of being overwhelmed by the data, and a temptation to prematurely foreclose this stage which I tried to resist (Nias, 1991). The length of transcripts (in some cases 10,000 words) was off-putting and initially led to a somewhat superficial reading. In addition, large chunks were initially coded (for brevity and speed) under very broad codes such as 'motivation', but this obviously led to missing of subtleties and refinements of respondents' views (see the Analysis, Chapter 6 for commentary on coding).

v. *From field texts to research texts*

Field texts were constructed around particular events and therefore tended to be descriptive. Research texts were at a distance from field texts, and grew out of the repeated asking of questions concerning meaning and significance. There was no smooth transition from field texts to research texts, and I kept returning to the field texts again and again, bringing new research puzzles and re-searching the texts. The transition to research texts was not a linear process, and I found myself writing a variety of different kinds of interim texts, which fell somewhere between field texts and the final research texts. Such interim texts should be shared with the participants, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), although I did not do this for reasons of time. Initial attempts at writing research texts was difficult, as the text sometimes did not capture the meanings that the participant had in mind, and may not capture the experiences of the participants. It was difficult to share the interim texts with participants, not only for practical reasons, but also because it can alter the working relationship between the researcher and the participant if the research document is in some

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way hurtful to the participant. I was reluctant, for example, to share some of the analyses on a discourse of 'care' with the participants for fear that they will infer a judgment about the 'correctness' or otherwise of their views.

A digital recorder was used to collect the information from respondents. This may have made people ill at ease (Nias, 1991). Although no-one appeared to object, some participants did surreptitiously glance at the recorder to check if they were being recorded, particularly when the interview was over.

Respondents did occasionally watch the recorder when they were expressing what may be seen as 'controversial' views (on for example particular schools or particular issues). It might have been possible to initially take notes and introduce the device later (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989), although there would have been obvious problems with trying to write down exactly what respondents said.

vi. Reliability, validity and generalisability

The reliability, validity and representativeness of life history have all been questioned, although these are questions that get asked of all social scientific research. Life history research is also of a different nature to other methods, and so issues of reliability, validity and representativeness do not apply in the same way. It is doubtful if life history will ever satisfy the charge of unrepresentativeness, as it is unable to sample large numbers of respondents and indeed this study has a small sample of only 32.

Despite these reservations, it should be possible to establish the validity of life history research, i.e. whether they are a true and accurate reflection of a situation from a person's point of view, by employing simple validity checks or 'validation strategies', such as comparing with documentary sources, other sources of data and respondent validation (taking the data back to the respondent for comments) (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). (One minor validation strategy was to cross-check respondents' views on the socio-economic make up of the schools with Government data on levels of free school meals.)

It may be more appropriate to look at authenticity rather than validity, i.e. examining the extent to which the documents ring true, and the ways in which the researcher feels that they are legitimate and authentic accounts of the respondents' life.

Reliability may not be an appropriate criterion to use when assessing life history research, as this kind of research is meant to reflect subjective accounts.

Replication is difficult as the study is heavily dependent upon interpersonal communication between the participants. Therefore, instead of reliability, it may be more useful to consider the data as a joint production between the researcher and the respondent and explore the co-production of meaning.

Representativeness needs to be translated to mean narrative authority and control, i.e. the way in which the narrative account itself was structured, what was included and committed, and the way in which what was said was said (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989).

Reliability, validity and generalisability may perhaps not be suitable when judging the usefulness of narrative enquiry. According to Clandinin and Connelly, it is more appropriate to look at 'apparency' and 'verisimilitude': criteria that put the emphasis on the recognisability of the field in the research text, and 'transferability', which takes the emphasis off generalisability (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000 p. 185). It was also important for me to avoid the 'illusion of causality'; an apparent cause and effect relationship that appears to exist when narrating events in a temporal sequence (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.185).

It can be seen therefore that the consensus in the literature is that narrative research should not be judged by the same criteria as other research methods as narrative research methods are based on individual interpretations of complex events, and are not concerned with generalisable events (Webster and Mertova, 2007). So, reliability and validity require rethinking when applied to narrative research, (see the Conclusion, Chapter Eleven, for more discussion of these issues).

Validity in the traditional sense was hard to apply to narrative research as this study was not meant to be an exact record of what happened or an exact reflection of the external world. So, access to reliable and trustworthy records of the stories as told by individuals is the cornerstone of validity and reliability therefore I needed to collect, record and make accessible the data in ways that can be understood and used by those analysing, auditing or having an interest in reading the data. As this is a departure from traditional understandings of

validity and reliability, I needed to detail how I used validity and reliability (Webster and Mertova, 2007).

Regarding validity, it cannot be claimed that the research corresponded exactly with what has actually occurred, and so cannot be said to be 'true' in the traditional sense that validity is said to indicate. Personal narratives were not meant to be read as an exact record of what happened, or a mirror to what is 'out there'. Also, triangulation is often used to try and satisfy the validity of the research (in this thesis, by the use of focus groups), but it is almost impossible to achieve. By using triangulation there is a presumption that using different sources of data will lead to one ultimate truth, but it can be argued that this one 'truth' does not exist, just a multiplicity of 'truths'. Reliability (in the sense that replication will yield similar results) may not be easy to achieve in narrative research, but Huberman (1995) contends that if the narrative researcher can demonstrate rigorous methods of reading and interpreting that would enable other researchers to track down his or her conclusions, then reliability is achievable in terms of access and honesty.

Consequently, new measures are needed to assess reliability and validity: access, honesty, verisimilitude, authenticity, familiarity, transferability and economy (Huberman, 1995).

vii. Reliability and validity: access; honesty; verisimilitude; authenticity; familiarity; transferability; and economy

a. Access has two dimensions: access by readers of the study to the participants, their cultural contexts and the process of construction of knowledge between the researcher and participants of the study; and secondly, the availability and representation to the same audience of the research notes, transcripts, and data on which the researcher has based their findings. All of the above items have been carefully maintained, and it is hoped that the details of both the respondents and the details of the process of the construction of the analysis help to increase access to the study.

b. Regarding *honesty*, the trustworthiness of the narrative research lies in the confirmation by the participants of their reported stories of experience. The reporting should appear to have a level of plausibility. When using a critical events approach, the truthfulness of accounts and reporting results will be confirmed through like and other events (see definition of other events on p. 7). Respondents often re-confirmed details of their stories within the interviews and although the accuracy of memory and the possibility of the 'construction' of stories is noted (see p. 230 for further discussion).

c. *Authenticity* is when the researcher provides enough information in order to convince the reader that the story is told in a serious and honest way. For example, authenticity may be achieved through sufficient narrative coherence. This study attempts to draw the themes of the respondents' stories together in a

coherent way and the use of significant verbatim extracts from the transcripts aims to improve authenticity.

d. *Familiarity* means that researchers need to make the familiar strange again and avoid taken-for-granted assumptions. Critical events themselves capture the unforeseen. Therefore, I tried to present many of the critical events in detail so that 'familiar' events such as, for example, becoming a parent, can be looked at anew.

e. *Transferability* in a narrative enquiry sense means that the researcher provides sufficient base to permit a person contemplating applications in another setting to make comparisons of similarity. Transferability is provided by the use of critical, like and other events. They provide richness of detail and accessibility so that a reader should be able to make applications in another setting. It is hoped that in this study the use of types of critical events could enable them to be applied to other studies, perhaps using larger samples taking a longitudinal approach.

f. *Economy* is required as the mechanisms for analysing these large amounts of data were challenging and confronting me as a researcher. Economy is required that will not compromise the integrity of the data or its findings. Narrative research can lead to seemingly endless categorisation of data, with difficulty in determining an end point. I attempted to code the transcripts with economy and brevity whilst not distorting the responses.

Similarly, Lieblich and Tuval-Masiach (1998) propose the following four criteria as an alternative to the traditional measures of reliability, validity and generalisability:

a. *Width*: the comprehensiveness of the evidence, which is the quality of the interviews or the observations as well as the proposed interpretation or analysis. Numerous quotations as well as alternative explanations are provided for the reader's judgment of the evidence and its interpretation.

b. *Coherence*: the way different parts of the interpretation create a complete and meaningful picture. Coherence can be evaluated both internally, in terms of how the parts fit together, and externally, against existing theories and previous research. It is hoped that the conclusions demonstrate how the findings fit together and the research is also compared to the existing literature.

c. *Insightfulness*: the sense of innovation or originality in the presentation of the story and its analysis. It is intended that the research gives an insight into an area of life history research that has not been addressed before i.e. teachers of children with SEN.

d. *Parsimony*: the analysis is based on a small number of concepts and elegance or aesthetic appeal. In this study, it is hoped that a relatively limited number of key concepts have been used relating to the critical events, to ensure that the narrative is not overly complicated.

Lieblich and Tuval-Masiach (1998) do not refer directly to validity in a traditional sense but propose that a process of consensual validation is used- sharing one's views and conclusions and making sense of it in the eyes of a community of researchers and interested, informed individuals.

In summary, this study attempts to address reliability and validity in these non-traditional ways, as described above. However, it is recognised that there are limits to reliability and validity and these are addressed in the conclusion (Chapter 11).

The next section will describe some of the practical issues in setting up the focus group interviews (see Chapter 4 for an exploration of why this method was chosen).

Focus groups in operation

This next section will discuss some of the methodological issues around: the setting up and execution of focus groups; defining the focus group and sample size; group composition; focus group discussions; and the potential for feminist research. It will then analyse the challenges of focus groups and examine how these were overcome.

i. Focus groups: definition, sample size, number of groups

The literature variously defines focus groups as group interviews (Hughes and DuMont, 1993; Mactavish *et al.* 2000, Morgan, 1998) or group discussions (Coreil, 1995; Kitzinger, 1995, Krueger, 1998). Most of the literature agrees that focus groups involve the purposeful use of interaction in order to generate data, and it is this use of interaction that distinguishes them from other groups (McLafferty, 2004). Morgan (1996) identifies three major components of focus group research:

- i. a method devoted to data collection;
- ii. interaction as a source of data; and
- iii. the active role of the researcher in creating group discussion for data collection.

The debates around definition can be traced back to differences in preferences in the relative amount of control the moderator exerts over the structure of the focus group. More structured focus groups resemble group interviews (see later discussion of the role of structure in the study, pp.115-117). Focus groups where the moderator is less involved resemble group discussions. There is also a lack of consensus on how to organize and execute focus groups, such as over their composition and the most suitable number of participants (McLafferty, 2004) (explored further, below).

In an attempt to gain consensus on the distinct nature of focus groups, Wilson (1997) draws together a variety of definitions of focus groups, and argues that they have the following common elements:

- small group of 4-12 people;
- meet with a trained researcher, facilitator or moderator;
- last between 1-2 hours;
- discuss selected topics;
- non-threatening environment;
- explore participants' perceptions, attitudes, feelings, ideas; and
- encourage and utilise group interactions.

The last point in the above list was the most significant criterion as it distinguished focus groups from group interviews (Wilson, 1997, p. 3).

The number of focus groups and the size of the group was a significant consideration. Krueger (1994) suggests that the minimum number of focus groups may be three, and the maximum 12. It has been argued that four is enough, and the issue of response saturation should be considered after the third (Nyamanthi and Shuler (1990) in McLafferty, 2004). I ended the focus groups when no new information was being collected (this was after the fourth group).

Little consensus exists about the most appropriate sample size (McLafferty, 2004). Greenbaum (1988) identifies three different types of focus groups: full

groups, which comprise of ten to 12 people; mini-groups, which have four to six participants; and telephone groups, linked by teleconferencing. It has been argued that a group of four generates fewer concepts than a group of eight, a finding which is opposed by Morgan (1996) who argues that smaller groups are easier to manage, especially for sensitive topics and those where there may be much discussion.

Furthermore, some authors suggest that groups should be between six to 10 people; or four to eight; or four to five and sometimes up to 20 (McLafferty, 2004). However there appears to have been little evaluation of the relationships between sample size and effectiveness, making definitive conclusions about group size difficult. In this study, the focus group size ended up being between five and 13 members, which was sufficient for discussion.

ii. Group composition

There is an over-emphasis on the degree of control researchers can have on the composition of focus groups, and in this study the exact make-up of the groups reflected circumstances rather than planning (Bloor *et al.*, 2001).

Such practical issues largely governed the group composition. Existing friendship or social groups were a useful source of the pilot focus group participants, and so it was possible to tap into data which approximates to 'naturally occurring' data (Bloor *et al.*, 2001). The pilot groups of TAs had shared experiences and events to draw upon, and could challenge any

discrepancies between expressed views and actual behaviour. There was also a practical benefit to using this pre-existing group, as this obviously made recruitment easier, and drop-out was less as participation may seem less daunting and there was a shared obligation to attend (Bloor *et al.*, 2001). An existing group of students at the author's university was used as the pilot group and this resulted in seven respondents turning up.

Three of the four focus groups were (unintentionally) female-only. There is some evidence that women's friendship groups tend to be based around small numbers, and therefore focus groups of women may be more productive if they are smaller (Bloor *et al.*, 2001). There were potential problems with small group size, however, as the discussion may be limited, and groups could even be cancelled if one or two people dropped out (and at one stage, this was a possibility although in the end all groups went ahead). There was a danger that smaller focus groups would end up being question and answer sessions with an interviewer, which would defeat the purpose of a focus group situation. The groups tended to start off like this and only when they had progressed for some time did in-depth discussion occur. Larger groups brought their own challenges. They were more difficult to moderate, and perhaps were frustrating if participants felt that they had not had a chance to say what they wanted to say. Also, discussions in which participants enthusiastically took part could be somewhat chaotic, and the more vociferous members could take over; this did occasionally occur in the larger groups.

The size of the group also had implications for the transcription, as the more members there are, the more difficult it was to identify them in the transcription. This highlights the importance of assigning identifiers to members within the transcript and this was achieved by my research assistant who transcribed all of the digital sound files.

It was sometimes difficult to ensure attendance at focus groups. I sent a reminder letter and email in advance of the date to try and ensure that participants turned up. Information sheets and my contact number were provided so that respondents could contact me with any queries in advance. Despite these safeguards, a number of participants did not turn up to the focus groups for a variety of reasons (childcare and travel problems, for example), but most gave no reason and did not contact me and so it is difficult to say why they chose not to participate and what effect this had on the representativeness of the sample and results.

Basic demographic data was required for the project and this was collected in advance, and time was built in for this. I also attached an information sheet and an informed consent sheet to this questionnaire (Bloor *et al.*, 2001, and see Appendix iii).

iii. Focus group discussions

Focus group interviews were chosen primarily due to the quality of the discussion that was hoped to occur. The discussion can encourage both

'complementary' and 'argumentative' interactions, to examine both how the similarities and differences between group participants can contribute to the data generating process (Kitzinger, 1994). The fact that group participants provide an audience for each other meant that there was more variety of communication than with traditional data collection methods. Anecdotes, jokes, loose words and so on were encouraged and developed more within the focus group and this may be more revealing than other ways of collecting data. The focus groups certainly produced more anecdotes than may have otherwise have been the case and often provided more 'stories' than the interviews, as the participants bounced ideas off each other.

Data was also collected on group norms, such as the assertion of group consensus. The disadvantage of the development of group norms was that the group can censor deviation from group standards, and inhibit people from talking about certain things. On the other hand, groups helped members to overcome embarrassment and provide mutual support in expressing feelings, especially over sensitive topics or over opinions that may be perceived as deviating from mainstream culture (or the assumed culture of the researcher). Groups can also enable people to express views which break away from dominant cultural constructions, particularly around experiences of a sensitive nature. Therefore, the impact of a group on the expression of individual points of view was not purely negative, and so making generalisations about the influence of the group may be unjustified (Kitzinger, 1994). Within my focus groups, group consensus emerged particularly within the student group, perhaps due to the existing friendships within the group, peer pressure and the

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social acceptability of certain views. For example, consensus tended to emerge around definitions of SEN and the reasons why respondents wanted to work with children, which may have been products of the group interaction and might differ from what respondents would say in an interview.

However, the social nature of focus groups led to some revealing discussion. Such spontaneity that arose from the social context of the focus group was a strength of this kind of research, and it has been argued that participants reveal more of their own views in the process of responding to one another (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). The views were also perhaps less influenced by the views of the researcher than would be the case in a one-to-one interview and often the participants discussed issues with each other rather than me as a researcher.

iv. Potential for feminist research

Focus group research is seen to have potential for feminist research (Wilkinson, 1998), as it can give more power to the respondents to determine the focus of the project and to disrupt the traditional power relations and imbalance between researcher and respondent (although as a researcher I did of course, still have the power over choice of topic, prompts, and so on, and the last say over data analysis). However, the combined contributions of the respondents can add up to new directions and questions to perhaps influence the trajectory of the project in a new way (Jowett and O'Toole, 2006) and this is certainly the case in the pilot focus group which lead to a shift in the direction of the project (see pp.77-81).

The socio-economic background of participants needed to be considered when designing the research, particularly when considering the TA pilot group, who tended to reflect the socio-economic composition of the area. O'Toole's research (2006) on working class women who had returned to education after years of manual work paid careful attention to making the research context informal, and she did not posit herself as an 'authority' figure. This strategy as aimed at encouraging talk amongst participants in a more relaxed atmosphere. However, as O'Toole noted, focus groups are hardly natural situations: they are formed by the researcher inviting individuals to meet together for a particular purpose, which has been determined by the researcher. In that sense, the focus groups will always be artificial situations (Kitzinger, 1994).

Despite these strategies, the respondents in O'Toole's study still found the situation 'false' and unwelcoming, as demonstrated by lack of talk, and their obvious physical discomfort. The women in the study were obviously constrained by the research setting and did not feel comfortable contributing, partly as they saw the moderator as being 'in charge' and the group as a 'class'. There was also a tendency towards conformity between group members, and a tendency to agree with the moderator's views and cues, as well as nervousness about speaking in a group situation, particularly as they were aware of being tape-recorded. In mixed –gender groups, it was noticeable that the men tended to speak first, and dominated the group discussions (Jowett and O'Toole, 2006) (this also happened in the one focus group in this study that had a male member). O'Toole also felt that the group members were trying to establish

what it was that she wanted to find out, and to provide what they thought were appropriate answers, with the result that the discussion was stunted and lacked any genuine substance. By contrast, after the focus group when the tape was turned off, the participants were happy to chat and share their opinions and stories (which also happened in the pilot group of TAs in this study).

Jowett's research (2006) looked at the attitudes and feelings of young British women towards feminism. In contrast to O'Toole's study, the women were very talkative and moved the discussion on in various different directions. The debate followed its own path. In this case, the group did manage to disrupt power relations between the researcher and the researched somewhat, as the group challenged the researchers' assumptions and moved the discussion on in different directions of their choice, and turned the questions back on the researcher and asked for her opinion.

The two illustrations above demonstrate that the social and cultural locations from which participants' accounts are drawn can influence their responses in a focus group situation, although perhaps not in ways that can be predicted. The mature students found the focus group an unwelcome experience, as it reminded them of classroom situations and of being academically examined (and perhaps the TA focus group in the study mirrors this example). However, the younger females of the second study saw the focus group as a safe space with which to debate a topic. Their confidence, inspired by the group situation, resulted in a challenge to the researcher's 'authority'. The studies were a

reminder to me that I needed to treat the participant's reactions to the methods as research data in itself (Jowett and O'Toole, 2006).

Despite the potential for the empowerment of the participants, Bloor *et al.* (2001) challenge the idea that focus groups are an inherently feminist method. Focus groups do not report the 'voice of oppressed women' in a straightforward and unmediated way (Bloor *et al.*, 2001; Kitzinger, 1994); focus groups may not be as directly controlled by the researcher as other methods, but they still contain their own hierarchies and also status differences between participants, and so, although focus groups may be a way to study feminist research topic (see Jowett and O'Toole, above), they are not in of themselves a feminist method. (For example, status differences also emerged in my group of teachers with the more experienced SENCOs in the group quite frequently asserting their authority and 'expertise' over the others.)

Challenges of focus groups

Despite the advantages of using focus groups to draw out respondents' life histories, several problems occurred, around: group interaction; topic choice; respondent validation and group silences.

i. Group interaction

Focus groups should be viewed as a performance by all participants, including the person running the group. The opinions within the group are not previously

formed, static views, but are constructed in the social situation of the focus group. Due to the performativity involved in focus group interaction, generalisation from focus groups can be difficult. It may be more useful to consider a more tentative and provisional form of extrapolation and focus more on generating hypotheses than drawing conclusions, and this is what this study aimed to do. However, if focus groups cannot be generalized, it may be possible to transfer the findings to other settings which have similarities to the context in which the data were gathered. Therefore, generalization from focus groups is not impossible but it is of a very different nature from that displayed by other qualitative techniques (Sim, 1998).

Determining the strength of viewpoint within and across focus groups was problematic (Sim, 1998). Counting and coding the times a particular view point was expressed had disadvantages, as this may simply have been an expression of the pattern of interaction at the time (see later sections on my coding strategy, p. 140). A similar argument can be made regarding the strength of feeling; this may also be a reflection of the interaction taking place, rather than an expression of underlying attitudes. The force by which an individual express an opinion may change significantly in a different context. In addition, what participants find interesting to discuss may not be the same as important to them (Morgan, 1996). These issues make it difficult to compare the separate focus groups regarding relative strength of opinion that appear to emerge from them. All that could perhaps be achieved is a comparison of whether the same or different views or issues were raised (see Chapters 7-10 on the strength of opinion on particular issues).

ii. *Respondent validation*

Respondent validation in focus groups was not straightforward; there were ethical as well as practical problems, and providing participants with written transcripts of group discussions needed careful consideration. Reconvening groups was impractical and the dynamics of the group would in any case change. Feeding back preliminary findings in a dissemination session was a possible response. What I eventually decided was to send finished chapters of the dissertation for participants to read although this did not elicit any response.

Bloor *et al.* (2001) argue that giving feedback to participants, and subsequently gaining their views on the findings, can demonstrate that the participants recognise themselves in the research and that their understandings of situations were successfully reported. However, participants may react in different ways, for example being indifferent, hostile, or challenging the findings, and that these initial views can change over time. Members' views are provisional and can be subject to change, and just as focus groups may not truly represent people's views, neither can the validation exercise completely authenticate the findings. However, Bloor *et al.* argue that end-of-study focus groups to validate the findings are good practice for three reasons: i. they can give additional data to deepen the initial analysis; ii. they can give feedback to participants who have little interest in reading an academic publication; iii. the promise of giving such feedback may facilitate access at the start of the project. For practical and financial reasons, an end-of-study focus group was not convened. A smaller follow-up study on what the respondents are doing now is planned.

iii. Group silences

The fear of group silences causes great anxiety for focus group facilitators (Bloor *et al.*, 2001) and this was of great concern to me. There can be several causes of group silences. Participants may be suspicious of each other, or restrained by a suspicion of the moderator. Silences can also reflect problems in the recruitment process; low status groups may not feel willing to take part in groups run by higher- status researchers. There can also be pre-existing hostilities between group members if they are known to one another, and if there are groups that contain members of different status positions, those of lower status may defer to the opinions of a superordinate group member. Group silences were not a significant feature of the focus groups; in fact, quite the reverse was the case. The only time a silence was experienced was in the pilot focus group of TAs when asked about their definitions of SEN; this may have been due to the status difference between them and myself, or wanting to consider a 'correct' response, or other unknown reasons.

Focus groups in operation: practicalities

I carried out four focus groups, including the pilot group, of 60-90 minutes each, to the extent that I reached theoretical saturation (Krueger and Casey, 2000). This was supplemented with life history interviews (see previous section). This next section will address some of the practical issues around how the focus groups operated.

i. Practicalities

The structure of the focus groups was as follows (Breen, 2006):

- The welcome;
- An overview of the topic;
- Statement of the ground rules of the focus group, and assurance of confidentiality; and
- Questions: beginning with general experiences and progressing to specific problems.

Questions were based around probing participants' experiences, asking participants to share and compare experiences, and discussing the extent to which they agree or disagree with each other. Only in the final third of the interview did I actively engage participants in the key research questions (see p.117 for a description of the 'funnel' technique).

I noted in the margin of a notebook the time it was intended to spend on each question, leaving enough time for the key questions. See Appendices ii, iii, iv and v for examples of: the consent form; questions; and introductory remarks.

ii. Structured/unstructured approach

The pilot focus group aimed to discover the appropriate degree of structure. According to Morgan (1998), with a semi-structured approach, the researchers' interests predominate, whereas in less structured groups the participants'

interests have priority. The degree of structure determined the kind of data that the discussions will produce, and so it influenced every aspect of the project; how the questions were written, how the moderator interacted with the participants, and how the analysis was done. I decided to use a moderate degree of structure (see below).

If a researcher has a very distinct set of questions to be addressed, then a more structured approach is needed that will keep the discussion focused on the issues that needed to be addressed. A set of topics would be needed, with direction about the amount of time to devote to each.

A different kind of project starts by not even knowing what the right questions are; the focus group will reveal what needs to be known. A less structured approach can be used to discover the range of issues that needed to be understood. An interview guide needs open-ended questions, to spark the group's curiosity about the overall topic. The first (pilot) focus group had less structure for this reason. As the moderator, I helped the group to explore the topic in a way that generated new insights. The discussion emphasised the participants' interests and concerns.

Listening to what the participants chose to discuss in a less structured discussion revealed their perspective on the research topic and thereby enabled me to learn about what was important to the participants. The goal was to discover new ideas and insights. The downside of a less structured approach was that the first group was quite erratic in terms of its productivity. It was hard

to tell if discussion was leading to a new insight or just wandering off the point: this was challenging for me and often the group did veer off into anecdotes which were not always relevant. I needed to decide whether to allow the discussion going in an apparently unproductive direction, or move the discussion on at the risk of missing valuable information and this was not an easy decision.

The three subsequent focus groups had a moderate degree of structure (see Appendix vi). I used a degree of structure, where I wanted both the research team's focus and the participant's interests. One specific strategy for implementing a moderate degree of structure was the 'funnel design', which I eventually adopted (see p.117).

This more structured groups had a guide to follow in the same order from group to group. This helped to channel group interaction and helped in making comparisons across groups in the analysis (although the difficulties of this kind of comparisons have been noted). A good guide created a natural progression across topics with some overlap between the topics (artificial compartmentalisation would have defeated the purpose of using group interaction). A guide was based directly on questions, for a moderately structured approach (see Appendix vi). As the moderator I therefore controlled the direction of the group discussion.

It was important to use the guide as a suggested framework only, rather than to follow a predetermined order of topics in a rigid fashion. In this way, as the

moderator I was free to probe more deeply where necessary and skip over areas which had already been covered, and follow new topics if they arose. An effective semi-structured guide produced a discussion that largely managed itself.

iii. Funnel design

A funnel design for topics was used (Morgan, 1998) to enable a move from broader to narrower topics. At the top of the funnel were one or two broad open-ended questions. These were aimed at encouraging all of the participants to contribute rather than be researcher-dominated (Krueger 1998). The questions were factual and not aimed at eliciting opinion or attitudes (see Appendix vi for example questions).

It was important to keep the introductions and instructions as brief as possible, as lengthy introductions would give the impression that the moderator would be telling the participants what to do. The introduction offered the admission that I was there to learn from the participants (see Appendix iv for the opening remarks). In the introductions, it was important not to use titles, but use first names, including my first name (Vaughn *et al.*, 1996). Name badges were useful for the transcriber to identify who was speaking.

Built in to the discussion was an opportunity to implement a 'focusing exercise' (Bloor *et al.*, p. 43), to help to concentrate the group's attention on the topic. This was a ranking exercise, where the group is offered a list of statements and

is asked to rank them in the order of importance. Different statements were placed on different cards, and participants are asked to rank them in order of importance. The discussion about the rankings was intended to highlight differences of opinion and tacit understandings within the group (see Appendix vi for examples). This was abandoned after the pilot as although it created discussion, it did not generate any data that was useful to the research questions.

Participants were also given vignettes to discuss. These were hypothetical cases or scenarios with particular features that made them suggestive of real life situations to respondents, who were then asked what course of action they would take (Bloor *et al.*, 2001 and Appendix vi). The tasks were also used as ice-breakers to get participants to lose any initial self-consciousness. The vignettes did help as a warm-up exercise but they were also abandoned after the pilot as they did not generate materials useful to the research (see previous sections for a discussion of this).

Summary

In summary, a mixture of theoretical, methodological and practical issues were considered when implementing the research methods. Simultaneously, ethical issues were addressed, and were reflected upon throughout the life of the project.

Ethical considerations

At all stages, the ethical guidelines of the University and the British Educational Research Association were adhered to (UEL, 2011; BERA, 2004, 2011).

Permission was sought from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and the Committee's guidelines were followed at all times (UEL, 2011).

Focus Groups

Most projects involving focus groups pose few ethical issues (Morgan, 1998b), but when such issues do arise, they obviously require careful attention. The first issue to consider was if the participants would be at risk. I provided a 'Statement of Informed Consent' to the participants, to tell them about the potential risks in the project and their rights as participants in the project (Morgan, 1998b, p. 86). (See Appendix iii for consent form based on Morgan, 1998b p.86; UEL, 2011; BERA, 2004, 2011). All participants signed the consent form and these were kept securely. The data was stored on a password-protected computer in line with the Data Protection Act's requirements (UEL, 2011). The participants were told that they had the right to withdraw at any stage (BERA, 2004; 2011; UEL, 2011).

Privacy was the central ethical concern in focus group research. The first step was to restrict access to information that revealed the participants' identities, and therefore anonymity and confidentiality needed to be addressed. There is a distinction between anonymity and confidentiality. Anonymity meant that there

was no way to identify who the participants were. Few focus groups qualify as offering true anonymity (Morgan, 1998b, p.87). Instead, it is more common to promise confidentiality, which means that identifying information will be gathered, but it will be carefully protected (BERA, 2004, 2011).

The following steps helped in guaranteeing confidentiality, and they have been adhered to during my research (Morgan, 1998b, p. 88):

- i. Once recruitment was completed, only I had access to any of the recruitment information, and these records were destroyed at the conclusion of the project.
- ii. During the discussion, participants were identified only by pseudonyms.
- iii. Once transcription was complete, I was the only person who had access to the digital recordings that were made, and these recordings were destroyed at the conclusion of the project.
- iv. For any transcripts that were made, not only names but any other potentially identifying information (e.g. mentions of specific individuals, events or places) were either moved or modified (pseudonyms were used for both individuals and place names).

Procedures for maintaining confidentiality ensured that participants could safely share their experiences and opinions without having their statements used against them. It was my responsibility to devise such procedures and carry them out.

A different issue was what participants learnt about each other. Every interaction involved a degree of self-disclosure, and I needed to consider what an appropriate level of self-disclosure was. There might have been a real danger of over-disclosure, i.e. participants regretting that they revealed as much as they did. If just one person revealed some potentially damaging personal fact, or dangerously strong opinion without causing a disruption in the discussion, this could lead to others over-disclosing as they believe it is 'safe' to do so. This might be dangerous when there are ongoing relationships among participants, since the information may influence their future dealings with each other. This did not happen in the focus groups of this study, partly because several participants expressed concerns that their schools or themselves may be identified, which possibly constrained the kinds of information that they were prepared to disclose. The most effective way to deal with this was to call attention to it right from the start. It was important to remind participants that they already knew each other and their contacts would continue after the group is over. See Appendix iv for example opening remarks, which addressed this issue at the start of each focus group.

Over-disclosure may potentially have been more of a problem amongst strangers, who know they will ever meet again, and can lead to self-disclosure of things a participant may not tell friends or family. Setting boundaries helped to limit participants to reveal only what they were comfortable with.

Such boundaries were set in advance about what the acceptable limits of discussion were. This planning helped to recognise a potentially stressful

situation as soon as it occurred. Advance planning also helped to prevent invasions of privacy before people say things that they could not rescind. It was useful to imagine how participants would feel the morning after the group and whether they would regret what they have disclosed. A statement based on the following was used at the beginning of the focus groups (Morgan 1998b, p. 93):

Some of the topics that you'll be discussing today can be very sensitive and personal. We don't want you to say anything that you might regret later. And we don't want you to feel stressed by this discussion. So, if I sense that the discussion is getting too stressful or too personal, I'll have us all take a little break, relax for a minute, and then start up again at a level where everyone feels comfortable. (Morgan, 1998b, p.83).

My research assistant was encouraged to look for signs of stress within the group, and whether there were issues of over-disclosure. The focus groups did not appear to raise such issues, although participants did on occasion appear to feel uncomfortable when discussing the merits of inclusion, although this may have been that they perceived their views to be 'incorrect' rather than worries about over-disclosure.

Life history interviews

i. Initial issues

The way in which the life history was elicited shaped the kinds of expectations and understandings of both parties. It was crucial for me to fully explain the basis of the research to the participants (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). It was important to consider the kind of bargain that had been struck between myself as the researcher and the subject and what the basis of this relationship was. How did the respondents perceive the exercise, and how were the respondents and myself defining our roles and identities within the interaction? The respondent might bring a number of assumptions to the research situation that are not shared by me and I had my own view of the situation. These factors not only influenced what the individual recalled from memory but also the way in which this information was presented.

Ethical issues needed to be addressed over the entire life history process. These issues shifted and changed as I moved through the enquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). How to initially introduce participants to ethical issues needed consideration. One issue was the interpretation of informed consent. A consent form implies that the research project has been fully explained, but in reality, research tends to change over time, and the issues that were seen as salient at the start of the project shifted. The question therefore arises as to whether participants' consent can still be presumed (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

Anonymity was a difficult issue throughout the life history research. Anonymity must be guaranteed, but when in the field, visitors and others were aware of my role as a researcher. Also, some participants were happy to be identified afterwards when the research was disseminated although this needed careful consideration, as some participants were easily identifiable by the description of their local authority or by their own personal characteristics which were referred to in the interview.

ii. Ownership and trust

There was also an issue of who 'owns' the stories, the participants, or myself, or did joint ownership exist? A personal journal was written to separate material likely to be shared with participants from material I felt it was inappropriate to share. The question was whether material kept private at the field text stage could or should be made public at the research text stage. I was always aware that the research relationship may be terminated, which made it difficult for me to share certain aspects of the research and indeed I did not share or even allude to any of my private materials.

As trust developed, some participants gave me carte blanche to say what I wished, and I found myself being more cautious than the participants themselves as I was aware of how texts may ultimately be read (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). In this study, two participants became very emotional during their life history interview, and it is not clear that the respondents were aware of how this could appear in a subsequent research text. Some also gave extensive

detail about sensitive issues in their personal lives, some of which I decided not to use as it made the respondents more identifiable.

Following Sikes (2010), the most important ethical concern is that I did all I could to ensure that I represented lives respectfully and did not use narrative privileges and power to demean, belittle or take revenge (not that this latter point was ever an issue). I was careful to remember the significance of language and weigh up carefully how the words, phrases and discourses could be understood and experienced.

iii. Fiction and 'fact'

In the narrative enquiry, the distinction between fact and fiction could perhaps be muddled. When I was in the field, and being told a story, or an event was narrated, I did at times wonder about the basis of the story. Did the events described actually happen? How did I know? How does the teller know? These were appropriate questions to ask in my personal journal (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). What seemed like clear and certain answers then became more elusive, and what seems like 'fact' could seem like memory reconstruction (see Chapter 11 for a fuller discussion of this problem).

Another danger when writing the narrative was that of the 'Hollywood plot', where everything turned out well in the end (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, p. 181). These clean and unconditional plots have been called 'narrative smoothing'. This happens all the time in the move from field texts to research

texts, and I needed to make a series of judgements about how to balance the smoothing contained in the plot with what was obscured by the smoothing. It was an issue of being alert to what had not been told as well as what had been narrated. I acknowledged this narrative smoothing, and self-consciously disclosed the selections made and the possible alternative stories and other limitations (see Chapters 7-10). In some cases, the respondents did tell versions of the 'Hollywood plot', with many describing triumph over difficult circumstances in the past, and explaining that they were unambiguously happy in their current roles, despite the difficulties they had described. This may well be true, but I was always open to the possibility that the respondents were justifying their current position, or saving face, or putting up a front, for example.

iv. Analysis

One important ethical issue was how explicit I was about the process of generating and interpreting data. Researchers vary: some give very little account of the process, some provide some account, and some give a very detailed description and analysis of the process and methodology of research (Goodson, 1992). I have provided a detailed account of the process in Chapter 6, Analysis, and I demonstrated the kind of scaffolding of the story and research and the stages that went in to its building. The activities of me as a researcher were included in the accounts of the research (Chapter 6, Analysis).

v. *Relationships*

The relationship between myself as a researcher and the participants was particularly important in life history. The method hinges on developing a relationship and trust. It was more like 'interactive research' than interviewing (Ball, 1983 p.93). As a consequence of the relationship, some key ethical dilemmas emerged and these are not always recognised or discussed by researchers.

Within Measor and Sikes' research (1992), there was little or no 'negotiation' regarding the process and procedure, or 'ownership', use and dissemination of the data. The agreement was very informal, and Measor and Sikes suggest that a more formal, written document would give reassurance to the participants that the researchers would stick to an ethical code (Measor and Sikes, 1992). A consent form and guarantees of anonymity are particularly important to gain participants' trust (Munro, 1998), although as has already been noted, sensitive judgements need to be made about how and when to introduce such a form of participation.

Although 'coaxing' responses from participants is a key role of the interviewer, care was taken that participants were not coaxed to reveal more than they wanted to on sensitive issues. This did not appear to be an issue for the majority of respondents, and indeed apart from in two cases (discussed previously), little personal information was disclosed. There were also some sensitivities when people referred to others in ways that they might later come

to regret, especially in print. It was important not to include data that affected a participants' working situation or his or her own role performance (Measor and Sikes, 1992) and the careful disguising of work roles, school roles, school name and local authority prevented this.

Measor and Sikes (perhaps somewhat naively) did not realise that their research would have any effect on the lives of the participants. Some participants used the research as a counselling session, and some made major life decisions as a result of reflecting on their lives, such as deciding to leave teaching. It was important, therefore, for me to try and resist the idea that the research can be detached or uninvolved. Similarly, in previous research, very few researchers have paid attention to the impact of the research upon the subjects themselves. Because the focus was on key aspects of their life, turning points or reminiscences, the respondent was given the opportunity to look back to a life or career (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). Despite this potential impact, it was difficult for me to know the effect the research process had on the participants and this could be the subject of future research.

As noted above, a collaborative research style is often the ideal of life history research. However, participants in Munro's study were not interested in 'collaboration' and saw the exercise as 'work', and were not particularly interested in Munro's attempts to reciprocate by giving information about her own life history (Munro, 1998). Such self-disclosure on the part of the researcher can also be seen as a manipulative strategy in order to gain reciprocal information (see the Methodology, Chapter 5, which explores this

point further). A 'business like' attitude towards the relationship was surprising to Munro, and at odds with her expectation of collaboration with her participants (Munro 1998, p. 128). 'Collaboration' may be an attempt by the researcher to make their discomfort with a hierarchical research relationship. Similarly, I had a dilemma in wanting to keep a distance to prevent myself as a researcher from imposing my own meaning on the situation, whilst getting close to participants so that they opened up.

It was particularly important to be careful when researching students or acquaintances. There may be unintended consequences and implications as a result of the research process and results. A relatively close relationship may also mean that respondents are cautious about what they reveal. The less cautious respondents were those that I knew personally (one respondent) but the most reserved (initially) were students in the pilot focus group, perhaps due to the in-built status difference between myself and them.

Research on life histories, particularly in the area of emotions, also lead to ethical dilemmas when 'fake friendship' is utilised to encourage respondents to disclose (Holland, 2007). This can add to the commercialisation of human feeling (Holland, 2007) in that I may have deliberately developed empathy and rapport for the instrumental reason of gaining data. In this study, some respondents appeared eager to please and gain approval for their responses, commenting that 'I'm not sure if this is what you want...' 'Did you get everything you need?' 'Was that right?' etc. At times this made me uncomfortable, as did the process of 'faking friendship' to obtain more detailed responses.

Conversely, rapport sometimes did not occur because of the social and emotional distance between myself and the respondent, and this led to me suppressing and ignoring negative feelings which might have effectively been explored within the research (Holland, 2007). I did occasionally feel uncomfortable with some of the 'medicalised' views of children with SEN that some participants expressed but I did not feel able to address these in the research situation for fear of disrupting the process and jeopardising the data collection. I remained uncomfortable in expressing what may be perceived as 'judgmental' views on my respondents' opinions.

Despite these warnings about ethical issues, Measor and Sikes believe that there are no easy answers to the dilemmas: 'No hard and fast rules can be laid down; these are matters of conscience rather than science' (Measor and Sikes, 1992, p. 226). For this reason, ethical issues were examined and re-examined and re-visited throughout the study.

vi. Myself as researcher

An issue that needed to be resolved was for me to consider and reveal my own motivations for doing the research (Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Holland, 2007). Most people will choose a topic that has meaning and interest for them, and will usually choose one related to something in their own lives. It was therefore important to be as reflective and reflexive as possible and make this explicit to readers (see Introduction). Reflecting upon and acknowledging the emotional connectedness to the processes and practices of fieldwork was crucial

(Goodson and Sikes 2001). As the choice of method reflected my own biography, 'the reflexive character of social research' and to reflect upon the research process was noted in the Introduction (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1989).

According to Sikes (2010), writing lives is always an auto/biographical process. In analysing and making sense of and writing other people's lives, my own life, my beliefs and values, and my positionality, inevitably were implicated. Therefore, it was unethical to offer a version of someone else's life without making clear the nature of the gaze that is being brought to bear upon it (see also Cole, 2004). There can be consequences for this but reflexivity and honesty about one's positionality and its role in sense-making are integral components of ethical practice. Therefore, at the end of the interviews I was occasionally asked my reasons for conducting the study and I always answered these questions as fully as possible (to the best of my knowledge).

Despite these important ethical considerations, it was useful to bear in mind Hammersley's view on the resilience of research subjects: they are not 'fearful victims' of the process but choose to open up their lives for a variety of reasons and will have their own boundaries and strategies to protect themselves in research situations (Hammersley, 1983).

CHAPTER SIX: ANALYSIS

The transcripts were coded by using NVivo after an initial first paper analysis. (It should be noted that inter-rater reliability was not addressed in the analysis of focus group data.) Emerging themes and subsequent research questions came directly from the pilot study and the subsequent analysis of the transcripts rather than being decided by me beforehand. (It could be argued that to a certain extent these themes were determined by the kinds of questions asked initially, although a semi-structured approach did allow themes to emerge from the respondents.) NVivo was used to more systematically draw out the frequency and the intensity of the emerging themes.

The choice of participants' quotations to use was a difficult one. NVivo coding helped to highlight passages of interest and relevance, as the codes were nested within the respondents' speech and gave the context of the code. So, this first analysis helped to decide which quotations from the participants were most relevant. However, this initial process still produced an excess of data. All of the quotations were interesting, relevant, meaningful and thought-provoking, but a decision had to be made on what to include. It was very much a 'heart versus head' decision; my heart wanted to include all the responses but this became unwieldy and ultimately made the work unreadable for an academic audience, and in places, repetitive. Therefore, I had to decide which quotations were most apposite; examples that were felt to be repetitive were taken out, although this was a difficult process as all of the data seemed to have value and interest to me. However, it is hoped that the presence of the respondents is still

represented in the dissertation and that their influence is imbued within it, even if every quotation has not been used.

Due this production of excessive and largely descriptive narrative data, I was aware of the tendency for the focus group researcher and life historian to become a 'teller of stories', rather than developing an analysis of what is said. Theory-building is often neglected (Wilson, 1997) as the presentation of results becomes focused on presenting the 'voices' of participants. I tried to avoid this in the analysis by trying to draw out common themes between the participants through the coding process. Therefore the focus group and interview data was amalgamated; there was sufficient commonality in the themes within the responses to warrant combining the data at the stage of the analysis.

The huge amount of data collected was overwhelming, but I tried to ensure that the analysis was driven by the common themes that were emerging.

According to Krueger and Casey (2000), analysis should be sequential, verifiable, and continuous. Sequential analysis helped to ensure that the results reflected what was said in the focus groups and interviews. The analytical procedure therefore was documented, understood and clearly articulated by me, so that I could explain where a particular part of the analysis came from.

The analysis also needed to be verifiable, i.e. another researcher should be able to come to similar conclusions using available documents and the data. I was aware of the danger of selective perception (the tendency to hear comments that confirm a particular point of view). Sufficient data needed to be

kept to constitute a trail of evidence, such as field notes, recordings, and transcripts. These were kept securely on a computer and copies made.

Unlike other data collection methods, focus group analysis was continuous. Analysis began after the first focus group was completed, and each subsequent group was analysed and compared to earlier groups. The analysis was transcript-based, supplemented with field notes (see section on field notes and texts, p.92). The interviews were also transcribed and analysis of the interview data began as soon as the first one was transcribed (although there was sometimes a significant time lag between the focus groups and interviews and the production of the transcripts).

Using a computer helped to code the data (see section on NVivo, below). NVivo 7 was used to help process and analyse the data. It allowed possibilities such as the ability to 'nest' codes i.e. have a shorter quote within a longer quote, and each could be coded differently. Also, it was possible to examine comments from participants with certain demographic characteristics. Using such computer programs helped me to consider carefully large quantities of data.

i. Initial stages of analysis

Proper analytic procedures were an essential part of ensuring the reliability and validity of this qualitative study. Field notes and diaries helped to draw out the recurrent patterns. The concepts and categories were drawn from the

participants themselves (sometimes called 'folk' categories (Delamont, 2002, p. 170)).

Coding was not a substitute for analysis (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996), but referred to the variety of approaches to and ways of organising the qualitative data. Coding brought together different segments or instances in the data, and those fragments were stitched together to create categories of data that had some common property or element. The coding therefore linked all those data fragments to a particular idea or concept. Those concepts in turn related to one another.

Codes were also at different levels of generality and specificity to reflect different analytic themes (Coffey and Atkinson, 2006). Too broad categories ended up being flat and lifeless, and so more attention was made to the categories of expression that the informant actually used, to identify themes that reflected their views more closely. Therefore, I tried as hard as possible to develop fine-grained codes that actually reflected respondents' views.

One of the important rules was not to let the data pile up unanalysed or unread; the material was read and re-read soon after collection so that analysis could begin. The process of analysis also continued throughout the research; it was not a self-contained stage. The data also needed to be indexed as soon as possible, and themes and categories were developed as I went along, and were reviewed. It was also important to develop as many codes as possible and not decide too early what the codes would be. Analytic memos were also important;

these were short notes in which I reviewed what I was doing and what would happen next.

Coding was the means by which concepts and theories were generated (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Coding was done initially by hand and codes were attached to the data using coloured highlighters before the process was refined using NVivo.

It was important to code what I was interested in and the primary focus of the study needed to be coded first, for example motivations for working with children with SEN. Analytic memos were written once the decision had been made to code a particular aspect of the data. The next step was to interrogate the data.

Interrogating the data means exploring systematically what the data are saying. The data should generate questions of interest to the overall project. At this stage, there was uncertainty and complexity about the analysis, and fieldwork notes and the data were re-read several times and reorganised. According to Delamont, 'various structures and explanatory frameworks should be used before the final version is offered to the public' (Delamont, 2002 p.179). (See also the section on constructing field texts, page 89.)

Once the data had been coded, it was then time to move on to generalisation and theorising.

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ii. *Analysis of coding - cross-sectional and non-cross-sectional coding*

The procedure in the analysis of qualitative data was the identification of key themes, concepts or categories. Some concepts were 'in vivo,' that is, based on the terms of those being studied and others were chosen by myself and included common sense terms, terms influenced by the literature, or concepts derived by myself to capture the essence of talk and interaction (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). I used initial labels or codes which loosely used participants' own terms, or what is known as 'sensitizing concepts' which later developed into more definite, analytical concepts.

Categories were used to organize and analyse qualitative data using a cross-sectional method. In cross-sectional analysis, I devised a common set of categories which was applied across the whole data-set and used as a way of searching for and retrieving parts of labelled data. This approach gave an overview of the scope of the data and found themes that did not appear in an orderly way in the data, and located analytical and conceptual categories in the data and to help make comparisons and connections (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).

Code and retrieve processes have been criticised for grouping and comparing chunks of data outside of the context in which they occurred (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). However, this breaking up of the data was a way of furthering analytical understanding as the data freed me from description alone and forced interpretation to a higher level of abstraction.

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iii. Analysis of focus group data

The second form of analysis was participant-based group analysis, where the contributions of individual participants were separately analysed within the context of the discussion as a whole. This allowed the information of each participant to be retained and for interactions between individual members to be noted as part of the recording of the group dynamic.

The advantage of participant-based analysis over whole group analysis was that it allowed more detailed evidence about similarities and differences between group members to be analysed. The main disadvantage was that it removed the immediate context within which contributions were made. It was also more time-consuming than group-based analysis because the contributions of each member had to be traced throughout the discussion (see Chapter Eleven for more on the disadvantages of this approach).

Using NVivo

i. Process

NVivo 7 was used to analyse the focus group and qualitative life history data, as it was suitable for a very detailed and finely articulated study using relatively small amounts of data. A web-site (www.sagepub.co.uk/richards) (Richards, 2005) was used as an NVivo tutorial, together with Richards' work on qualitative methods (Richards, 2005).

NVivo provided facilities for data management, for coding and retrieving text, and for theory testing. NVivo was open-ended so that it could be used in many different ways. The software used the document and node as central organising concepts. Nodes represented ideas and were linked to marked-up passages in documents and were organized into hierarchical trees, which were simply an organizing system in the software that enabled more efficient interrogation of its databases; as a result, it could be restructured very simply at any point in the research (Crowley *et al.*, 2002).

The research community has been divided about the use of software in qualitative research (Crowley *et al.*, 2002). The concerns often centre on losses of data involved in putting data into the computer, and on the abstraction that occurs once the data are in the computer. The 'distance' between the researcher and the screen has been commented upon (Richards, 2005). It has been argued that the use of software makes research more reliable and robust, and certainly more transparent, although this depends upon how the software is used by the researcher.

ii. Coding

NVivo allowed me to carry out all the processes that were carried out previously via paper-based methods. NVivo highlighted passages of interest, and it was possible to also electronically note features in an interview without doing coding. It was also possible to edit whilst coding, and also to treat research notes,

bibliographies and memos as part of the project, along with field notes and texts. In this way, the project did not need to be divided into the aspects that are done on computer and the rest (notes, results, reports and so on) (Richards, T. 2002).

NVivo gave the ability to code text rapidly and it also removed the boundaries of limited storage capacity in paper filing systems. The software linked text with codes, and retrieved text according to the category or categories at which it was coded, importantly retrieving the context too. Text extracts retrieved could be considered together, and thereby described, queried and re-viewed (Richards, L., 2002).

It was possible to take a coded segment back to the context, rethink and recode, and developing new dimensions of the category, a process called 'coding –on' from previous coding (Richards, L. 2002 p. 272). The results of coding could be reflected upon and reviewed via the node browser.

NVivo also helped with theory building (Tesch 1990, in Richards, L., 2002). The programme also asked questions not just of the coding of a text segment, but of the whole file or other text segments. This was a version of the way researchers used to lodge theoretical hunches and growing interpretations on paper, by storing and editing memos.

Theory-building was achieved via coding, in particular, expanding ways of asking questions about coding and saving and reusing the results of searches. This is called systems closure (Richards, L., 2002 p. 270). Coding helped me to

build theories about the research, and then to check such theories through re-searching and cross-checking the codes.

iii. Some reservations regarding NVivo

Despite the perceived advantages of the coding capacity described above, coding can be seen as the greatest downside of NVivo. Since it can be much more thorough, coding is likely to be more demanding and relied upon during analysis (Gilbert, 2002). Coding can even be automated, and so detailed coding can be encouraged, and much more descriptive coding is possible. Finer discriminations in retrieving codes can be made (Richards, L. 2002).

This was not always advantageous, however. It can be argued that coding and retrieving text was not solely what I was trying to do; previously, coding was a means to gathering and reviewing data so that it would be possible to read, review and thereby gain a higher level of interpretation. Richards warns against 'coding fetishism' whereby novice researchers are encouraged by the ease of coding to keep doing it, so that the act of coding becomes an end in itself (Richards, L., 2002). Over-coding at the expense of interpretation was a major unintended consequence of qualitative coding and this is something that I tried hard to avoid as I found myself becoming more and more engaged in the coding process sometimes at the expense of analysis and interpretation.

This process led to becoming too close to the data at times, and being 'bogged down' in coding (Griffiths, 2002 p. 218). The software gave me the opportunity

to get very close to the data, but coding could also become mechanical and unthinking. Extensive coding also provided an excuse to delay other steps of the analysis process, such as making decisions about what the data was saying. It may be that I was particularly uncertain about the process of qualitative research and was therefore more vulnerable to this problem (Griffiths, 2002).

Despite sometimes becoming too close to the data, conversely there have also been concerns that such closeness can be lost by using computer software (Griffiths, 2002). In particular, I was concerned about the transitions from manual practices to using technology. This 'tactile-digital divide' involves adapting to working on a computer screen rather than on paper, a transition that was difficult at times. It initially lead to a feeling of lack of closeness to the data, but this was overcome quite quickly and eventually I used a synthesis of manual and computer methods (a manual read-through of the field-notes and transcripts and then subsequent use of NVivo for coding).

It was also important to consider software processes with the same degree of reflectivity that should accompany qualitative research processes in general (Gilbert, 2002). Metacognitive processes extend to include software use, and this form of awareness was increased and deepened when I achieved greater familiarity with the program. Self-monitoring was one aspect of metacognition: thinking about how I worked in a particular way, and why. Another issue was error recognition. Those with greatest expertise are most likely to see the potential for making mistakes, such as constructing searches incorrectly, or

unwittingly miscoding data. As an inexperienced user, I may have made mistakes that I was not even aware of, thereby distancing myself from the data in a potentially serious way (Gilbert, 2002). The use of software also influenced working methods, for example at times it may be that I used more textual documents such as transcripts that could be more easily handled and relied less on field notes as they required typing up.

It was also important for me not to have unrealistic expectations about what the software could achieve. I tried not to assume that the use of software automatically conferred credibility (Gilbert, 2002). As I was not very experienced in qualitative research techniques, I had to work hard to resist the temptation to assume that using NVivo gave the research greater reliability or credibility than if it had been done using non-computer methods.

In summary, general agreement has been reached that programmes such as NVivo have been beneficial to the analytic process, although not without reservations (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). The main benefits are seen to be the speed that these methods offer when handling large amounts of data, the improvements in rigour or consistency of approach, the ability of computer software to assist with conceptualisation and theory building, and the ease of navigating and linking of data. However, it can be argued that the ease and speed of the computer packages give the potential for the taking of shortcuts. I also found that it encouraged the taking away of chunks of the data from their original context (see the previous section for further discussion of this). I also had a fear that coding gave a scientific gloss to the analytic process, rather than

going through the (preferable) processes of teasing out meaning within its context, or looking for overall structure in the data.

Additionally, the use of computer-assisted analysis software did not reduce the need for me to play the crucial role in data analysis. Coding of data should not be seen as a substitute for analysis (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). It was a way of organising data, but not a substitute for analysis. I still needed to decide for myself what analytic issues were to be explored, which ideas were important ,and what ways of presenting the data were the most appropriate.

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Next steps: Presentation of findings

The next chapters will focus on the findings. The data from the focus groups and interviews was combined together, as the pilot found that common themes emerged from both methods (although see Chapter 11 (Conclusion) for reservations about the type of data that emerges from each method).

Some basic quantitative data has been included and this emerged from the NVivo coding process, described above. Potential problems about the quantification of this data are addressed in the conclusion (Chapter 11).

The next chapter will focus on the first significant finding: critical incidents – which had a high emotional content - were significant in determining why respondents began to work with children with SEN.

CHAPTER SEVEN: FINDINGS: 'I DIDN'T CHOOSE SEN, IT CHOSE ME'- A CAREER AS A SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS CO-ORDINATOR (SENCO)

This chapter focuses on the first phase of respondents' careers - why they began in the profession. It will examine the critical incidents in respondents' early working lives and personal lives which lead them to working with children with SEN, and these lead to emotional engagement in their work.

SENCOs were likely to work with children with special educational needs due to early experiences in their personal and work lives (Table 2). The findings appear to support previous work that showed that critical incidents in work and home life influence the decision to work with children with SEN (Measor, 1985; Schutz, 2001). Early experience related to special needs in their personal and work life were the most commonly mentioned factors in leading to respondents working as SENCOs. Early work experience was influential and this often developed a greater commitment to children with SEN and their parents (Jones, 2004) but also significant was personal and biographical experiences. Sometimes these two factors combined to determine why an individual went into working with children with SEN. So, although early work experience was mentioned as the most frequent factor, respondents sometimes (unsurprisingly) had overlapping motivations, making it difficult to tease out the most significant determinants. Early experiences at work was the most frequently cited determinants of career choice (22 respondents).

Table 2: What experiences led to you wanting to become a SENCO?

Experiences:	Number respondents:
Having a disabled child	7
Having a disabled sibling	3
Having a disabled relative	2
Early experiences working with children with SEN	22
'Fell into it'	4

Thus, critical incidents and experiences at work, particularly early experience in the SEN field, appeared to be the biggest influence on whether to follow this career path across the whole sample, and this was coded 36 times (22 respondents). (The total number of cases adds up to more than the total sample size, as some respondents gave more than one example of what motivated them into working with children with SEN.) Of course, the number of times an incident is coded does not necessarily illustrate the intensity or significance of an experience, and the quality and importance of the experiences to the respondents will be explored later.

Experience later in one's career appeared to be less influential than early working life and was mentioned by fewer respondents, although some respondents moved to the SENCO role later in their career as they could see the potentially wider influence of SENCO position. The findings suggest that a combination of personal and work experiences influenced respondents, and for some the relative importance of these factors differed. The following section will

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illustrate the different reasons why SENCOs decided to work with children with SEN, and the emotions this engendered in carrying out the role.

i. Family experiences: relatives, disabled children and disabled siblings

Family experiences sometimes combined with work to influence the decision to go into SEN:

[I think I became interested] because Mum's really passionate about it, and we had foster kids at home growing up. My Dad was involved in the field of social care and children, and I think it's just something that's just evolved as a kind of passion really that you feel for the children.

(Siobhan, secondary SENCO).

For one aspiring SENCO, having a child with SEN, home background, her own perceived underachievement and subsequent empathy for those who also find school difficult, together with early work experiences led to a decision to work in SEN in later life.

The influence of parents was significant for some respondents, particularly the values inculcated when they were being brought up. The ability to fit the SENCO role in within a family was important:

[My mother had an influence] yes, possibly yes, and two of my older sisters went to teacher training as well. It was a good second job to do

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with children, and there was probably that influence. (*Andrea, primary SENCO*).

A total of 12 respondents had either a disabled child (seven), a disabled sibling (three) or a disabled relative (two). Having one's own children led to a growing knowledge of child development and coincided with greater experience at work. Having a disabled child, fitting family life in with work, and having a greater knowledge of children often led to an interest in SEN during respondents' early to mid-careers.

For Alison, her interest grew and deepened with further experience, especially having children. Her comments mirror those of the other nine respondents who mentioned the ability to fit having a family in with teaching:

[On her interest in SEN:] Perhaps it's also growth, and maybe it's life experiences. [...] I know for me, watching my own children grow and being aware of what they brought home, the good and the bad, and the things that upset them, the little things, has made me much more aware of the importance of what I say and do, the impact. (*Alison, teacher and SENCO*).

As previous research has found, working in teaching was seen as fitting in well with family life. Particular to this study, family experiences such as having a sibling, relative or child with SEN were significant for 12 respondents (see Table

Two). In particular, having a child with SEN led to a determination to improve the provision in the schools within which they were teaching.

Family experiences, having a child with SEN, and witnessing poor provision were significant for this respondent:

I've always worked in special ed. I have an uncle with cerebral palsy and hearing impairments and I grew up with special needs in education. The way that he was treated, the horror stories that my Mum used to tell us about what happened to him during his education, it just made me think 'we can do a lot better than that sort of thing'. First of all, I worked with hearing impaired [children] in a hearing impaired unit that were the most of the time included within the mainstream classroom. Then I went to special school [and then into mainstream.]...I passionately wanted to work in primary working in SEN, because I've got a child of my own who has Aspergers, ADHD and severe mental health issues and I'm a big ambassador for inclusion. (*Sharon, nursery/primary resource base manager*).

Having a disabled child was a motivating factor for this respondent to enter teaching:

I haven't been teaching very long at all - I'm in my fifth year of teaching. Before I became a teacher, going back a further step

when I had my own children, one of my children has special needs. He's autistic, although he's grown up and left now, and I became his advocate really, and became and involved in education and this whole world of special needs which I thought was really rather fascinating. Then when I finished producing children and wanted to go back to work like lots of Mums, I wanted something that fitted in with school holidays. He wasn't the sort of child you could not be there for so I took on the TA role. (*Zoe, primary SENCO*).

Having one's own children often led to a growing in experience of children and coincided with greater experience at work. Fitting family life in with work and having a greater knowledge of children and child development often led to an interest in SEN during respondents' early to mid careers.

Having children, and meeting other children and parents lead to a particular interest in SEN teaching:

Another thing that probably started [my interest] as well was after I started really, when we went to Snowton. I came out of teaching because of my family. I ran a mother and baby club and that was really because we were a bit isolated, I guess, and I wanted my lad to have some company. And it was interesting, because there were children in that group who you knew there was something the matter with them, kind of a bit dodgy [*sic*]. You could tell by their behaviour that they were you know they were different from the

others. One didn't seem to speak; she had an older sister who was about 7 and she didn't seem to speak and she ended up going to a school for the Deaf, and when I look back I can see all sorts of different behaviours. It's quite interesting seeing them from babies. We were there for 8 years so we've got some quite good friends really. *(Charlotte, teacher and former SENCO).*

For Emily, the decision to go into teaching was made for family reasons:

Well, I suppose I enjoyed working with children. I was a Guider, and I wanted children, I wanted to get married and I thought it was a career that would fit in quite nicely with having children. *(Emily, primary SENCO).*

Early experience in the home and school was influential on this respondent, especially the 'maternal' aspects of her experiences:

I always wanted to be a teacher since as long as I can remember. I think it's probably to do with my family dynamics in that I'm the oldest girl of 6 children and I was always the baby sitter, the 'looker-after', I was a 'mini-Mum' if you like to all of them. I think some of it was the difficulties that I had in school that made me feel that with some of the old dragons *[sic]* that used to teach me I could do better job than them. *(Pat, SENCO).*

Zoe acknowledged the influence of her own parents and having her own children on the decision to go into teaching. She experienced a greater emotional involvement after having her own children (see also Griffiths 2000; White, 2008). She also described the difficulties of training and having children:

The hard bits I find are that we have huge amounts of child protection issues which can be really difficult to deal with, particularly when you've got your own children. My youngest is year 6 now, and I have some year 6 children. That's really difficult. I don't get as caught up in it as I used to, but you can't not [get involved] with the lives these kids have got. So I find that really difficult. I like being able to give that time to my own children. My big ones don't but the little ones do. He is year 6, but he still goes to a childminder. You know for years when I was training, the childminder would come to my house at 6:10am in the morning, so that I could get the train to Bridgeton. I'd be walking down the road in the dark and the rain, and the childminder would arrive in the taxi and I forgot to say to her, 'oh by the way my daughter's in my bed, when you go to wake her up in her own room she won't be there.' So why am I really doing this? That's why I really like the holidays to give that back to my kids which is quite fun. I like being part of something bigger than I am. (*Zoe, primary SENCO*).

Training as a more mature woman made Jane more determined: '[...] we were all very determined women there wasn't a man on it, it was all Mums, we were all older and we're all very determined.' (*Jane, primary SENCO*).

Early academic experiences and a 'maternal instinct' were significant for Paula, a SENCO:

I had no intention of teaching actually I was just going [to university] for three years' doss. I don't know quite how [going into teaching] happened. I guess it's convenient, you think, 'long holidays'. I quite liked it when I started doing it. I quite like children. I do actually like little children. [I'm] quite maternal. I mean people used to think it was a bit funny cause I was a bit of tomboy, but I did like children especially little ones and those days you could do what you liked. It was all nice and cosy and in those days you could do quite arty things, quite good fun. I think it was the maternal instinct that took me to the little ones. (*Paula, independent sector, SENCO*).

For Emily, Lisa and Carol, their early work experience and having their own disabled child were the most significant influences:

After my daughter was born, I went into school very soon after that to volunteer with the pram [laughing]. And then number two came along and I said 'I can't possibly come in with two children'- 'oh yes you can' [laughing] so I carried on doing that and that was a big

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education. I enjoyed that, but it became apparent that our second children had big special needs. They thought he had profound mental handicap *[sic]* but he didn't actually, but that what his initially diagnosis was, and he had a fairly rotten time at the juniors and so on. When I went back, I went back vowing no child that I ever taught would have such a raw deal and that has been my motivation since. Whether the parents agree is another matter. *(Emily, primary SENCO).*

Emily also expressed frustration with the mainstream system, which motivated her to change provision:

I wanted children's difficulties to be taken seriously, and I suppose their strengths to be applauded. I think [my son's] schools did their best...It was just the constant attrition, which still is there today. At least the poorest children I teach in mainstream, ones who'd be in special schools, if there were special schools, I feel they get a better deal than they would scraping along in the bottom of a mainstream class. I would just pull them out [withdrawal from lessons] which is hard work. We've got Year 3 to Year 6 in the same room for literacy, but we've got some operating at a 3 year olds' level, a Downs child *[sic]* but her parents insisted she came to mainstream, well what do you do? *(Emily, primary SENCO).*

For Lisa, working in teaching and having a child with SEN was her main motivator:

...and I fell back into special needs later on when I had my children and I wanted a good part-time career. My own children have different learning needs and it's amazing how you feel a passion when you've got your own child to understand better. I started off always intending to work with children with special needs. (*Lisa, primary, ex-SENCO*).

Carol's volunteering experience led to her career in SEN:

I was on maternity leave after my third child and volunteered to do some extra reading in my other children's school. The Headteacher asked me to work with children who need extra help and I loved it. He sent me on an SEN course and I found it very fulfilling. My third child was diagnosed with epilepsy. I was interested in SEN prior to that, but my real interest developed since my daughters' diagnosis. The most important reason for working with children with SEN is to be able to put my experience of having children with disabilities to good use. I can empathise with other families and their children. There is no better experience than living it yourself; it really teaches you so much. My personal experience has given me an in-depth knowledge of how children with SEN live. It also has encouraged me to seek more information about various aspects of SEN-

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medical, educational, social and daily life adaptations. (*Carol, primary SENCO*).

ii. Early work experiences

The early aspects of a teachers' career often led them to want to become SENCOs. These experiences were often related to disability or SEN, including knowledge of other parents' challenges in having a child with SEN, having one's own disability, seeing pupil progress, and the variety in the job. Growing experience within teaching also lead to a different perspective and different motivations:

Having researched parental perspectives and seen it from a completely different angle, I have so much more empathy and understanding now even though I don't have children of my own. I just feel for the parents. (*Siobhan, secondary SENCO*).

For Colin, his own background and early work within an inclusive borough were influential in why he decided to go into SEN:

I actually became interested in SEN before that [because of] my own disability and with my experiences I wanted people to understand how it was for me and when I was at school. I became interested in SEN as time went on and also working within the borough for every class that you had, you had different types of children with different needs, and you

always wanted to know how you could actually help them. (*Colin, primary SENCO*).

Teaching pupils with certain needs, early support assistant roles, experiences of socially deprived areas, and some early success with pupils with SEN were also significant in a teachers' early career. Some early challenging work experiences and growing in confidence were significant for Alison and Dierdra:

[On an early years post:] It fitted me and actually, I loved it, and I learned a hell of a lot about little children. It just put me in very good stead because now I've got a much better feeling for child development. (*Alison, secondary teacher, SENCO*).

I didn't choose special needs, it chose me, because within my first year of teaching my head teacher said 'I think you're really good for special needs children, you could be a special needs coordinator' and I of course refused, because I hadn't had any experience then. [...] Then he put somebody else to do it and I thought 'I could do it better than that.' So when they left the following year I accepted the job and I absolutely love it. (*Dierdra, Nursery SENCO*).

Experiences in particular schools or settings such as special schools, consultancy work, and learning support in the early years of teaching often lead to a future move to mainstream SEN work. Teachers' first jobs in mainstream were significant in inculcating a determination to subsequently work in SEN,

such as working with children with particular challenges or having a particularly negative working experience:

[About a school with an EBD unit]: There were lots of other children who had other needs, and I found that actually getting those children on board and feeling positive was what I found very interesting. That was what started me off with it. (*Donna, primary SENCO*).

iii. Summary

Given the sample size, drawing generalised conclusions should be approached with caution. The data does indicate however that critical events in early work experience appear to be the greatest influences on whether someone will pursue a career working as a SENCO. These events included working in a particular borough; working with parents; and encounters with pupils with particular needs. To a lesser degree, experience when younger is significant for SENCOs (voluntary work, or having a sibling with SEN, for example); perhaps this early experience leaves a greater mark and leads to a desire to change provision on a wider scale, which the SENCO position may facilitate. Critical events in a teacher's personal life are also significant, especially becoming a parent of a child with SEN.

The next chapter goes deeper into participants' teaching lives: their experiences, emotions and critical events. This chapter examines emotional experiences in teaching. Chapter 9 examines the specific rewards that come

with teaching children with SEN. Chapter 10 explores the experiences that led respondents to stay working with children with SEN, some for many years,

CHAPTER EIGHT: 'IT'S BEEN A BIT OF A ROLLERCOASTER': SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS, EMOTIONAL LABOUR AND EMOTION WORK

Table 3: Emotions

Emotional experiences:	Number of coding references	Respondents
Frustration	5	5
Passion	10	6
Physical and Emotionally demanding	16	12
'Plate Spinning'	2	2
'Buzz'	5	5
Juggling	3	2
Love	39	10
Isolation	11	8

The previous chapter examined why respondents began working with children with SEN: critical incidences such as early work experience and experiences in their personal lives were emotionally-charged events which often lead to, for example, a 'passion' to work with children with SEN. Additionally, throughout their careers, respondents described critical events that influenced their experiences associated with working with children with SEN. These emotions ranged from positive expressions of love, care and passion, to stress, isolation and loneliness. The physically demanding nature of the work was also described.

i. *Positive emotions*

Passion, care, 'buzz', love

All respondents displayed emotional responses of some kind to their work; with 'love' being the most frequently coded emotion (39 times across 10 respondents, Table 3) with respondents expressing love of their job or of their pupils, for example. Six respondents emphasised the importance of 'care' to their work, with one teacher seeing 'care' as the top reason for wanting to work in this area.

There was a gendered dimension to the way participants discussed the idea of 'caring', which may reflect the nature of the sample; most participants were parents and often talked (not unproblematically) about the 'maternal' aspects of the role. The respondents particularly felt that women were generally more suited to SEN work, due to their supposed 'maternal' qualities. Most did not see this as a problem, and were perhaps drawing on their own experiences as parents which informed their classroom roles.

One SENCO participant also discussed the ambiguous nature of caring, as potentially leading to developing a patronising view of students:

(Alison, secondary, SENCO:) [gently mimicking other teachers]

'and they're so sweet those dears.'

[Laughing.]

One respondent talked about the extra caring that was required in the role, and believed that this was a particular feature of working with children with SEN:

And its no good just being a teacher, you've got to be a teacher and some [extra] to work in special needs. Not everybody is suited to that sort of specialist teaching really...I think its just that extra bit of caring, that extra ability to put aside the pressures of the curriculum and the external pressures of the tests ...I think to sort of care about them as a child and anything that's hurting them be it academic, social, emotional, whatever.
(*Frances, SEN tutor, primary*).

Together with placing a positive value on caring, the emotional aspects of the role gave five participants a 'buzz', even stressful events, and this was a distinctive feature of SEN working with children with SEN.

Respondents discussed the role of 'passion' in their work and they felt that this was an essential part of the job. Passion for particular aspects of working with children with SEN was demonstrated in a variety of ways, such as working with parents. Passion for SEN support in a particular subject area was expressed by one respondent. Another participant talked of SEN being 'in your blood' and another that she was 'born to be a SENCO'. Some were passionate about the SENCO role or passionate about a particular phase (in this case the primary phase) as they had a child with SEN in that stage of schooling. Being an advocate for children with SEN was crucial for some and this distinguished work in SEN from other aspects of curriculum work.

The different dimensions of 'love' were especially important to one respondent, who mentioned it three times: love of working one-to-one with students; the importance of children loving teachers; and her own love of learning. Nine respondents explicitly discussed their love for the job. This, and the other dimensions of love within work are demonstrated by this secondary SENCO participant who mentioned it six times:

You have a relationship with the parents properly. It's not just a job you know, they know you love their children and that's why I work in the field. I love the job, I love the children I can't imagine it wanting to do anything else [...] I just love the kids everything else just sort of pivots around that. You can have the skills and qualifications and just great empathy and being able to read the children's behaviour. I can see what motivates the behaviour or motivates certain actions. I'm not saying it's a gift because it sounds a bit [*pulls self-deprecating face*] but some people have that, their empathy, their intuition with children. (*Siobhan, secondary SENCO*).

ii. *Difficult emotions*

Despite the positive emotions felt by participants it was evident that they also carried out emotion work and emotional labour in the sense of managing emotions, hiding negative emotions, and experiencing the physical and mental toll of demanding work. It appears that hiding difficult emotions is the most challenging aspect of the job and this emotional dissonance appears to take the greatest emotional toll on respondents (discussed in Wharton, 2009). Aspects

of SEN work were seen as demanding and appeared to be particular to SEN rather than other aspects of working in schools; respondents described the greater need for liaison with other colleagues, as an aspect of the work that was significantly more demanding than other previous roles.

Physical and emotional demands

The demanding nature of work in SEN was emphasised by respondents, together with the need to hide emotions on occasion, particularly when working with children who were also seriously ill.

Many participants mentioned the need for resilience (Howard and Johnson, 2004; Day *et al.*, 2007), particularly to cope with children who were ill or who had complex physical, emotional or behavioural needs. Some mentioned the need to distance themselves from children and their parents in order to preserve their own emotional energies (see also Robson and Bailey, 2009, on the distancing tactics of staff in further education).

Isolation

Feelings of isolation and the necessary ability to cope with this were a particularly notable feature about respondents' experiences of working in SEN. Peripatetic teachers found working with children with SEN especially isolating.

Others discussed the lonely nature of work in mainstream schools. Because of job intensification and lack of non-teaching time, teachers had little opportunity to participate in informal learning, which could lead to feelings of isolation.

SENCOs felt that they were working alone and that they had no-one to share problems or experiences with, and this appeared to increase the longer they were in post. Some teachers felt that the children did not 'belong' to them, and often felt quite deeply the lack of Christmas cards and presents from children. The lack of attachment to a particular class was mentioned by some respondents:

[...] the one downside of doing what I do. ...the only thing I would say I find a little disconcerting is that I don't feel anybody is truly mine in the way the they are when you're a class teacher. (*Donna, primary SENCO*).

The importance of networking to combat isolation was emphasised, with local SENCO networks being seen as particularly important. The social isolation was particularly acute for some teachers, with one describing how she was often forgotten when staff went to the pub on Fridays or had not been asked to sign cards for colleagues.

SENCOs often felt separated from their mainstream colleagues:

Lisa (secondary teacher):

And I think, maybe, in our thinking, we're light years ahead of the class teacher, if you like, in that we are working in a different model in the school that we've been placed in. It's how we move people on from one stage to the next stage. You're dealing with prejudice, aren't you, and a reluctance to accept that the children are correctly placed, all those sorts of things. It's a very complex operation to be able to explain to people.

Tracy: And you're isolated.

Lisa: Yeah, no-one shows you how to do these things! (SENCO focus group).

Stress

All of the respondents mentioned the rewards of working in SEN just as much as the stressful aspects (the rewards are explored further in Chapter 9). Those responses that explicitly mentioned stress as a factor in their working lives are explored below, and often focused on colleagues, particular school settings, the physical aspects of stress and supporting children with particular needs. The particularly stressful aspects of working in SEN were often emphasised such as staff attitudes to inclusion and the frustrations of working with particular pupils:

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[The job is stressful] I think because of the unique position you're in. It's difficult trying to get other people to understand where you're coming from. You listen to conversations in the staff room and feel like you could happily take some of your colleagues by the throat because of their lack of understanding. It's stressful because it can be really really draining, frustrating, you know trying to get something through to the children and trying not to let that frustration come through to them. Because they've experienced that through everybody else and you're their last hope and if you start getting frustrated with them as well you know you can't do that to them. It is very hard sometimes. I have been known to go out of the room and say a few rude words and go back in again. (*Frances, SEN tutor, primary*).

The physically demanding nature of the stress was again emphasised:

[...] I didn't realize how much of a strain it wasn't until I actually left. [When I got home] I would have to have about half an hour just relax because it was it was hard work. I mean the school was lovely, the Head was great, but it was coming out of it when I realised how hard it was really. (*Charlotte, teacher and former SENCO*).

This physical aspect of stress were emphasised by a focus group of SENCOs, who noted how wearing the job was. Others discussed the physically demanding nature of the role:

...you never get any sort of break at all, all day, that's shocking, really tiring and I don't get much break now, I get about 15 minutes at lunchtime...it is very, very tiring and I try not to bring much home. I do 8am – 6pm. [...] I mean you can never win. There's always something else to do. (*Emily, primary SENCO*).

However, one participant did not think that the role was stressful compared to whole class teaching:

I would say at the moment the fact that you get to work with kids on a one-to-one basis or in small groups is fantastic compared to standing in front of a classroom of 30. That gives you so much more mental energy and because you're dealing with a manageable size and manageable group you can actually be build relationships and a rapport. (*Maria, sensory support teacher, secondary*).

Plate Spinning and Juggling

Four respondents used the metaphor of 'plate spinning' and 'juggling' to describe how they managed their jobs. They believed that this was a particular feature of SEN work, and the metaphors were used to highlight the complex and emotionally demanding nature of their roles.

[I am a] very good plate juggler [*sic*] I do feel that you do have to have a multi-track mind which I think I have. In the day I do have to switch very

quickly from all kinds of things from working with individuals to talking to parents to talking ...As we just saw earlier [incidents in corridor before the interview] I saw a student about aspirational grades, and I'm going to have to talk to the Deputy Head on that, and you know I've got a parent, I've got somebody from the LEA ring me up so it is a lot. You do need to hold to a lot of different kinds of roles in place and be prepared not to say 'I'm gonna do that and then I'm going to do this', you have to kind of have it all. Plate spinning I should say rather than juggling, plate spinning. Spin it on one pole, run to the other pole and so on. (*Lorna, secondary SENCO*).

The positive aspects of a busy role were sometimes highlighted:

Sometimes I feel it's a bit like spinning plates in that you might have certain weeks for you've got lots of different things happening and then you've just got to keep tabs on everything. I like the fact I'm busy doing the planning and sorting out the teaching and perhaps doing some work on the development of the subject, organizing paperwork, I like all these things, but on the other hand as well as liking it can be a bit like this at times [mimes juggling balls in the air.] (*Donna, primary SENCO*).

I am a bit behind on paper work. There are two pupils I need to refer to the behaviour support team, I know it's a days' work for each referral, and I've got to find two days to do it and I haven't been able to do it because of the SATs, special arrangements, two annual reviews etc. etc.

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so keep juggling the paper work to make sure all the priorities are right...there are so many balls to juggle. (*Emily, primary SENCO*).

iii. Policy, colleagues and emotional labour: fear, frustration and the changing roles

Relationships with colleagues could be wearing, particularly because non-SEN teachers were often frustrated themselves, as they felt that they had a lack of knowledge about how to deal with sometimes challenging pupils. Many SEN staff described the importance of having a sense of humour, 'so you don't crack under the tirade' (*Orla, SENCO*). As in O'Connor's study (2008), participants found dealing with staff sometimes difficult, due to the nature of their role in SEN as the 'expert'. They were then often blamed if children did not progress. As well as SEN being seen as a source of extra work and pressure on their colleagues, at the same time many SENCOs felt that they were expected to be 'experts' in every special need or disability:

And [teachers are] very critical when the SENCO is working with children and they don't see results, I know that that the perception is that 'she's not doing something right' if the child is not improving. (*Orla, SENCO*).

One respondent who was working in support for pupils with sensory difficulties remarked the negative influence of her headteacher, particularly the perceptions that work with children with SEN was devalued. This was often reflected in the attitudes of other staff (see previous section).

I'm quite unfulfilled. I have a really easy day with the kids but I don't feel in that rigor towards what I do: I don't really think anybody cares about it. The headmaster doesn't involve himself in any areas to do with inclusion. And he doesn't come and see the unit. Ofsted didn't even bother to come in and see us as all while they were there, which I found rather surprising and disturbing. And there doesn't seem to be any sense of urgency or importance. I... we all get the same impression, actually, that mainstream look at us and think, 'Well, we don't have to bother with John or Anne because they've got the support teachers, they'll differentiate.' But we can't differentiate, we don't know what the teacher is going to do from one minute to the next, so they won't come up and see us and we don't go down and see them: because of this there isn't any joint planning. (*Maria, sensory support teacher, secondary*).

The SENCOs in this study felt that their role was misunderstood, or that there was a general lack of understanding of SEN issues. In a time of increasing demands on all teachers, and an increasingly diverse working context, it was felt that teachers did not have an understanding of SEN issues, either due to lack of interest or, in some cases, a lack of time, as mainstream teachers found themselves overwhelmed by the challenges of working in an urban context.

[The hardest aspect is] I suppose, being that person that liaises with everybody, so you are trying to liaise with parents and other

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professionals and, then, teachers - class teachers and support teachers - and sometimes you, sort of, you try and pass things on. They don't always get done, at one end or the other, and that can be a bit frustrating. And sometimes it can be a bit difficult working with parents who don't who aren't terribly supportive, but equally staff sometimes. (*Caroline, primary SENCO*).

One SENCO mentioned her 'frustration' with various aspects of her job throughout the interview, but particularly with general education policy. Often, the wider education system and policies were mentioned rather than SEN policies specifically. This respondent also touched on the problems of paperwork and parents, addressed earlier:

What I dislike about the education system that impacts on SEN is to do with the results and everybody's got to reach a certain level that just doesn't seem to be much room for bending within that. And sometimes I get very frustrated with that, because I just don't think it's right, I just think there are some children that are not going to get to that level but it's not because they don't try and they don't work hard, they are just not particularly academic, and I think it's a real shame that as they leave reception that it really does change and it's not so flexible in year 1 and year 2. We do a lot of fun things but I struggled at the beginning with 'right, we've finished literacy now it's maths now we've finish maths now let's do some RE,' you're exhausted by lunchtime because you're always moving on to something new but that frustrates me a bit, I dislike that.

And I think sometimes when people won't cooperate, whether it's parents or staff, it can be difficult and that's frustrating because you know you are trying to do the best for the child. (*Caroline, SENCO, primary*).

Frustration was often experienced with paperwork, statementing and colleagues. Respondents who had been teaching for some time discussed the changes in SEN policy, and how this had impacted upon their role, describing the frustration this could engender and how they felt de-skilled (see also Norwich, 2008). Frustration with policy was emphasised by some respondents, particularly the length of time that the statementing process took, changes to the Code of Practice, local authority reorganisation and changes in the SENCO role that took them away from direct contact with children. For others, constant policy change was difficult to manage, and meant that new skills were always being required for working in SEN:

I think for some of us it's been a bit of a rollercoaster ride actually [...] But as they introduced different legislation it has felt like the goal posts are constantly being moved, and you can feel deskilled. I think a lot of SENCOs do say how deskilled they feel [...] I feel very frustrated by that so it has been a series of peaks and troughs. It seems to me and just when you feel you're becoming skilled something changes. (*Lisa, primary SENCO*).

The frustration relating to the paperwork needed for statutory assessment was remarked, and how much time it took to access any resources that might be

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made available in inner London local authorities, as demonstrated by this interview with Colin (primary SENCO).

SM: What kind of things do you like least about working in special needs?

The process, the amount of time it takes, frustration that you have to fill in a long application for exceptional resource funding when it's blatantly clear there is a problem, and also the fact that you get - if you do get accepted for it - that you have to wait a whole term for it.

SM: If you were to change the process what kind of things would you change?

The application and the length of time it takes to actually get to the professionals in that are required.

iv. Hiding emotions

Working in SEN can lead to particularly strong emotional reactions, especially when working with children who were ill. This was a particularly striking aspect of the focus group and interview responses. One focus group particularly focused on the emotional labour involved in having to hide their emotional responses to difficult situations and how draining this was. The ability to cope effectively with emotional experiences appeared to be related to the number of years teaching as illustrated by the following group of SENCOs, all of whom had been teaching for over 15 years:

It is [emotionally demanding]. I'm quite good at drawing a line and not allowing the children to get underneath my skin. But there's occasionally the odd one or two children I think I've overstepped the mark because they are terminally ill and the idea of not seeing children out of school hours, well if Mum phones you up and says actually this child has just had the last rites and are in hospital you're going to go, aren't you? And you get more emotionally involved with parents and you're thinking 'hold on a minute, have I overstepped the mark on my professional boundaries here?' Because what do you say, 'I'm sorry can't get that involved with you because I'm a teacher and you're a parent?' It just doesn't work like that. It just doesn't, not when you're talking with such poorly children.

(Sharon, nursery/primary resource base manager).

Those who had been working the longest often commented on their ability to cope with such emotional issues and their feelings, whilst those with less experience often became inappropriately involved with children and parents.

v. *Summary*

Although more negative emotional experiences were a significant feature of the study, 'love' was the most frequently coded emotion (39 times across 10 respondents) with respondents expressing love of their job or of their pupils, for example. Three SENCOs emphasised the importance of 'care' to their work, with one teacher seeing care as the top reason for wanting to work in SEN.

There was a gendered dimension to the way participants discussed the idea of 'caring', which may reflect the largely female nature of the sample. Most participants were parents and often talked (not unproblematically) about the 'maternal' aspects of the role. Participants felt that women were generally more suited to SEN work, due to their supposed 'maternal' qualities. Most did not see this as a problem, and were perhaps drawing on their own experiences as parents which informed their classroom roles.

Despite expressing the importance of positive emotions, it was evident that they also carried out emotion work and emotional labour through managing emotions, hiding negative emotions, and experiencing the physical and mental toll of challenging work. Hiding difficult emotions was often the most challenging aspect of the job and this emotional dissonance (Wharton, 2009) appears to be draining for respondents. Aspects of working with children with SEN were seen as demanding and appeared to be particular to SEN rather than other aspects of working in schools. For example, respondents described the greater need for liaison with other colleagues, as an aspect of the work that was significantly more demanding than other previous roles due to the often reluctant response of other staff (O'Connor, 2008).

Those responses that explicitly mentioned stress as a factor in their working lives often focused on colleagues, particular school settings, the physical aspects of stress and supporting children with particular needs. The uniquely stressful aspects of working with children with SEN were often emphasised

such as staff attitudes to inclusion and the frustrations of working with particular pupils.

Others discussed the lonely nature of work in mainstream schools. Because of job intensification and lack of non-teaching time, teachers had little opportunity to liaise with colleagues which lead to feelings of isolation. SENCOs in particular felt isolated and felt that they had no-one to share problems or experiences with, and this appeared to increase the longer they were in post for a small number of SENCOs. SENCOs were likely to express strong emotions, both positive and negative, and it appears that as a group they experience extreme highs and lows of the teaching experience. They were also likely to discuss the physical and emotional demands of the role (Table 3).

The next chapter will look in more detail at the kinds of rewards experienced by respondents: building confidence in their pupils; developing relationships; being an advocate and champion for parents and children; changing the system; and raising achievement. These dimensions of 'making a difference' are explored in detail to demonstrate the positive, emotionally rewarding aspects of the roles when teaching children with SEN.

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CHAPTER NINE: ACHIEVERS, CONFIDENCE-BUILDERS, ADVOCATES, RELATIONSHIP-DEVELOPERS AND SYSTEM-CHANGERS: WHAT 'MAKING A DIFFERENCE' MEANS TO THOSE WHO WORK WITH CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS- A TYPOLOGY OF REWARDS

i. Introduction

The initial focus of this study was on teachers' lives and careers and the reasons why they remained in teaching. Subsequently, as the pilot study progressed, a concentration on the emotions involved, particularly the rewards of teaching ('the little things') emerged as the key concern of the respondents. I was also struck by the frequency of the use by teachers of the phrase 'making a difference' in the research of Day *et al.* (2007) and I wanted to explore further what this meant for teachers of children with SEN.

In the conversations it became clear that respondents had a deep emotional attachment to their work, a subject that had not explored before in any great detail in previous research on those working with children with SEN. Chapter 8 noted that as they spent more time in their roles, respondents found themselves experiencing profound feelings, both positive and negative, such as care and love but also frustration, isolation and even anger. They also brought a great deal of emotion to the work, sometimes from being the parent or relative of a child with SEN or a long-standing passion for standing up for the 'underdog' (Mackenzie, 2011a). The strength of these feelings and the frequency in which

respondents used such emotional language was striking and made me view the transcripts in a different way.

Equal to the strength of the negative emotions explored in the previous chapter were deeply-felt enriching and rewarding experiences. It appears that work with children with SEN means experiencing the highs and lows of teaching more intensely (Chapter 7), with the strength of the rewarding emotions sustaining staff in their work, sometimes for over 20 years. This chapter will particularly focus on the emotional rewards of teaching children with SEN, focusing on how 'making a difference' meant improving children's achievement, building their confidence, being an advocate for parents, and the rewards of changing the system on a broader level.

The rewards experienced by teachers of children with SEN were classified into those who gained rewards from: facilitating academic achievement; confidence building; developing relationships; system-changing and advocacy. The findings are illustrated as a typology (Table 5) and participants were categorised by the primary reward they discussed: being system-changers, advocates, promoting academic achievement or confidence-building.

Table 4: Motivations for working with children with SEN

Motivations:	Number of coding references	Respondents
Making a difference	27	17
Intellectual	6	4
Parenthood	16	9
Progression	23	15
Attainment	26	13
Advocate	17	9
Care	9	6
Confidence-building	5	4
'Fell into it'	7	4
Having a disabled child	11	7

Table 5: Typology of 'making a difference'.

'Making a difference' as...	SENCOs/SEN Teachers
Confidence building	4
Relationships	4
System change	4
Advocate	9
Academic achievement	13
Other	7

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ii. *'Making a difference' to academic and social progress- small steps
(improving achievement)*

Academic rewards were the most common reward mentioned by the respondents. Indeed, for 28 respondents, it was a motivator to begin (and to continue) to work with children with SEN (Table 4). Thirteen of the 32 respondents mentioned 'making a difference' in terms of academic rewards (which may not be surprising given the emphasis in schools on teachers' promotion of academic achievement).

Often, the rewards were to be found in one-to-one teaching with students and individual support. In contrast, for Hargreaves (1994), the greatest rewards for primary teachers in particular were in whole- classroom situations, such as being missed by their students when they were absent; being their students' favourite teacher; being loved by students; and enjoying humorous moments with them.

As in Kitching *et al.* (2009), the respondents in the study found that the most important way to make a difference was through developing academic attainment:

Obviously when you enjoy something you're inclined to try and make a difference and I think it's really important for those children to try and make the same progress as their peers. (*Caroline, primary SENCO*).

Colin expressed his satisfaction in seeing academic progress across a year:

[It's] satisfying because when they come to you that beginning of the year and when you compare it to what they went out with the end of the year, it's a major difference and we don't realize that.[...] Another type of experience has also been in year 6 with the SATs. It's good to say that the children you are supporting are achieving. To give you an example for a child could not read or write very well... That child got Level 4 and it was the first time [that happened.] He actually boosted his self-esteem and parents were happy as well. (*Colin, primary SENCO*).

However small the academic progress was, teachers found pleasure in it.

Respondents described the small steps that children made and the rewards they obtained from this:

[Making a difference meant]:

I just thought of an image of this child I taught last year who came from a very poor background. Her mother cannot read therefore the child cannot and she physically held herself like she wanted to disappear. At that moment she was getting overweight and when we started working with her reading and at the end of it, she said to me 'I know that sound, it's the same sound as in moon' and I said 'yes, absolutely'. And she came from being a person who could not approach reading- 'I'm not supposed to ever learn to read because my mother can't read'- to someone who is meta-cognitive. (*Deanne, SENCO focus group*).

Respondents often gave examples of what Kitching *et al.*, (2009) call 'the little things' that kept them going:

It was delightful when I taught my literacy group 'The Hairy Toe' as our 'Book Week' effort. They made a lovely lift the flap book of it where you had to find the toe on each page and we went and recited the poem to the lower school classes who were all impressed- a lovely time for everybody. (*Frances, SEN tutor, primary*).

When asked what keeps her working with children with SEN, Frances again pointed to making a difference to academic attainment:

The rewards are feeling that you've helped somebody to get it, and I think the feeling that they appreciate what you're doing for them. And again that feeling of trying to make a difference to somebody which I know all teachers should be doing but especially making the difference for children that maybe nobody else is making that much difference for, or nobody else is all that bothered about making that much difference for them...I just love the feedback. Not the overt feed back but the look on the child's face when they have understood and they have been struggling with it for ages. Just giving them that feeling of success not matter how small. (*Frances, SEN tutor, primary*).

In particular, respondents found that they could make a difference on a one-to-one, individual level:

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SEN teachers are in the privileged position of being able to really focus in on the needs of the individual child, in a way that class teachers, on the whole, do not have the luxury of doing. (*Frances, SEN tutor, primary*).

iii. 'Making a difference' to relationships

This one-to-one work was often also focused on making a difference to relationships, where the rewards were experienced around developing aspects of social skills. This was often through individualised work with particular children. Four respondents mentioned that they did not miss whole-class work and found developing children's relationships on a small scale more fulfilling. Many gave vignettes of working with particular children:

[The main rewards are] working with the children. The small group work and the support and also alongside that the ideas, what can be done to help the children when they are not with you. We've got one boy who has Aspergers and a language disorder. He found it very difficult to cope with being in the playground. He used to hit children so we developed this 'homey' system, which is an adult that's named every day to go to if he's got a problem and he is getting wound up and he can't articulate why. This was arranged, and I got advice from various people, the language support teacher who works for the area and the ASD [*autistic spectrum disorder*] advisor, and we developed the system. So the idea

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is that he goes to that person and he doesn't have to talk to them or anything. It is like a safe place for him and that's helped him a lot and that was my idea and that's the sort of thing that I like to do. (*Donna, primary SENCO*).

iv. *'Making a difference' as confidence-building*

Building up confidence was particularly rewarding for four staff. These respondents tended to see children in a more holistic way and value building up a child's self-esteem rather than focusing on pursuing academic success:

There are children who will come up to me and say 'I can't read' and my task is to make them realize is that yes, they can. They might not be able to do it very well but they can. They can to something else really well or whatever. To me a lot of it is about confidence, about raising the self-esteem and also raising their ability to have a go. (*Donna, primary SENCO*).

Non-classroom activities were seen as particularly rewarding:

I thoroughly enjoyed taking my SEN outings. In my last school under the first Head I used to take a coach full of the worst children [*sic*] out for the day which everybody thought was wonderful because it cleared the decks for a bit. But I took them out into the country and we went to a centre and they were all scared rigid so they behaved themselves and

we had a really good day. We spent a long time planning it and how we behave in the country and the activities we wanted to do and they all came back grown taller. They could show the rest of the school how they made their own river or part of a castle or something like that and I suppose that is an area that I'm really delighted with, when I can do something with those children that nobody else has done, and we go back and we swank about it. Everybody else realises that they are the biz [business], you know. (*Zoe, primary SEN teacher*).

For those who taught in more difficult areas, rewards did not come from academic progress but from enjoyment of the locality, the outside world, trips, and craft work, which were seen as ways to build up confidence and self-esteem.

v. 'Making a difference' as an advocate, champion and fighter

There is very little in the general teaching literature about teachers of children with SEN as advocates, with the exception of Jones (2004). In her study, special education teachers saw themselves as being committed to a cause and as advocates, especially for parents, although they did not want to be seen as martyrs or associated with motives such as benevolence (Jones 2004). The emphasis on the importance of advocacy appears to be specific to the role of teachers of pupils with SEN. In this study, nine participants mentioned this as their main reward that they gained from teaching; although this was often

combined with other rewarding aspects. (See later sections for more discussion of the complexity of the rewards gained through teaching.)

Many mentioned being an advocate for the child but also a 'champion', having to 'fight' both for the children and often on behalf of their parents. This was mentioned by nine respondents, and it is notable that eight out of the nine had been working for more than 10 years. The longer a respondent had been working, the more likely they were to see themselves as an advocate. In particular, some had experience of being an advocate for their own children. Additionally, all of those who mentioned it (apart from one) currently had positions of responsibility, and arguably wanted to use this position to advocate for students.

Frances discussed dimensions of being an advocate frequently. For her, making a difference meant supporting the underdog, being an advocate, and promoting academic achievement:

I think it's that chance to work with children and make a difference to them, hopefully give them a good experience in their education. You hope that you're perhaps the sort of teacher they might remember in years to come and look back and think 'oh yeah, she did that with me' or 'somebody taught me that and it really helped'. ... I feel that I bang the drum for them quite a lot. I do feel quite passionate about it, and involved. It feels like it's a good job for me to have. It's got its downsides but then I think all jobs have. (*Frances, SEN tutor, primary*).

Some discussed being an advocate when parents could not carry out this role:

[I am] quite interested in things like advocacy, in giving children a voice. For some of our children, parents either can't do that for themselves, or they won't do that so I think it's really important that they've got someone in school who will advocate [for them] and get their needs met. (*Caroline, primary SENCO*).

Influenced by having their own children, for some respondents being an advocate for parents was particularly important:

And I always say to parents when I'm working with or alongside is 'I want you to have confidence that I would give your child exactly what I would expect my child to received within a school' and fight the corner for the parents as well. (*Sharon, nursery/primary resource base manager*).

Two respondents pointed out that working with parents could be a rewarding part of the job:

The parents do still email me now and ring me and my mobile number. You have a relationship with the parents, properly. It's not just a job, you know. They know [that] you love their children. That's why I work in the field. (*Siobhan, primary SENCO*).

Back to what [I] was saying about the SENCO role, a lot of it is awareness-raising, information-giving, being an advocate for students and perhaps the parents who don't always access the usual channels. (*Lorna, secondary SENCO*).

According to Kitching *et al.* (2009), interactions with parents could be both positive and negative, and teachers experienced frustration over a lack of support from parents over such things as homework (see also Lasky, 2000). Student behaviour and interaction with students' homes were seen as a major source of dissatisfaction in Kitching *et al.*'s study. However, in the current study, interaction with parents was viewed mostly positively, perhaps due to the closer working relationships parents had with staff due to the nature of their jobs working with children with SEN (although paradoxically this closeness may give rise to more possibilities for conflict). As well as being advocates for parents, staff largely enjoyed their positive interactions with them.

When parents were perceived by teachers to be positive in their interactions, it was where they believed that parents were being responsible, where they supported and recognized teachers' efforts, and when they recognised their professional judgment (Lasky, 2000). Similarly, in this study, where communication with parents was good, the interaction was perceived as a rewarding part of the role:

I just feel for the parents. I went to see a child yesterday. He has applied to come to our school in September and he used to have a brain tumour.

He is in a mainstream school in a wheelchair. His mum is a single mum. Now she's fighting to keep him the mainstream and you just feel for these people and you want to have the knowledge and skills to be able to actively effect change for these people. On a personal level it's an amazing feeling. There's so much of a higher chance to help people navigate that path. (*Siobhan, secondary SENCO*).

Advocacy was often seen as 'fighting', sometimes with the local authority and also within the school:

In [Midlandshire] the funding is one of the worst in the country...I don't think Midlandshire really recognised dyslexia...you've really got to fight for a statement for it...and you have to have failed completely before they will help you. (*Frances, SEN tutor, primary*).

Frances discussed 'fighting' to meet the needs of children:

I would have found it really frustrating and made myself very unpopular fighting for children to get what I felt what they needed when nobody else was going to put the resources in...you've got to be able to fight your corner within the school with the management...we have to fight to get some of the children that we know we're not meeting their needs because the schools are closing or because they're not deemed bad enough [*sic*] to be in those schools; it's not inclusion to me...the kids are going to be more vulnerable because there is no-one fighting their corner

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in the same way...and their parents can't fight for them either, it's the parents who are more equipped to deal with the system who will fight for their children. (*Frances, SEN tutor, primary*).

For some, they were an advocate for their own children with SEN, and this led to developing an advocacy role in school.

Before I became a teacher when I had my own children, one of my children has special needs. He's autistic (although he's grown up and left now) and I became sort of his advocate really. (*Zoe, primary SEN teacher*).

vi. 'Making a difference' to changing the system

For four respondents, making a difference meant changing the school system, by helping other teachers, for example, or improving SEN provision at the school, by setting up record-keeping systems, for example. For Siobhan, working with other staff in the school was vital:

When given time and opportunity you see a different side of them as well. And also with staff, it's quite revealing to work with staff in a variety of ways from beginner teachers to head teachers on different aspects of things. It's good to see all that, it's good to have a kind a wider view of things. (*Siobhan, secondary SENCO*).

For some, it was seeing external interventions working well (especially since Every Child Matters had been introduced (Great Britain. Department of Education and Skills, 2003) and seeing the impact of effective intervention. Some valued using their expertise in a particular area (e.g. dyslexia) as a way to make a difference to whole-school systems.

vii. Summary

It should be noted that some respondents (unsurprisingly) mentioned more than one reward from teaching. It appears that 'making a difference' to children with SEN in this study largely meant making a difference to their academic progress (as in Day *et al.*'s study, 2007) (although the small sample size in this study makes generalisation difficult). Respondents mentioned more than one source of satisfaction and 'made a difference' in multiple ways. This was to be expected; but what was notable was the longer a respondent had been working with children with SEN, the more likely they were to find rewards in being an advocate for pupils and parents, perhaps reflecting their greater status and confidence in their work.

'Academic progress' as a reward may seem apparent, but for teachers of children with SEN this has different dimensions and is more nuanced, particularly focusing on very fine, detailed individual work and 'small steps'. Teachers' intention to making a difference did sometimes cause problems; being an advocate brought them into conflict with other staff and this was often the biggest barrier in their work (Mackenzie, 2009; Jones, 2004). Sometimes

they had to battle with parents when advocating for the child despite generally good relationships. Being an advocate or champion for a cause or pupils or parents could also be problematic as it threw up images of martyrs and benevolence (Jones, 2004, p. 166), something that teachers did not want to be associated with. The danger was that teachers were seen as being part of a crusade and some staff in this study wanted to ensure that they were advocates for all children and not just championing the cause of children with SEN.

Seven respondents who mentioned 'making a difference' did not expand on the concept and so their understanding of this term is unclear. Perhaps it was so obvious and taken-for-granted by the respondents that it did not need explaining? Alternatively this lack of exploration may be an artefact of the focus groups; perhaps the discussion did not allow them the opportunity to expand on their understandings of 'making a difference'. The number of times 'making a difference' was mentioned was not noticed until the transcripts were analysed; therefore I was not able to follow up the meanings *in situ*. To a certain degree, this has led to post-hoc analysis with little opportunity for respondent validation.

It should also be noted that 'making a difference' is a socially acceptable response to asking teachers what rewards they experience; it has become part of an accepted narrative of teaching, so much so that perhaps some respondents did not feel the necessity to explore it in any detail.

Less commonly mentioned meanings of 'making a difference' were early interventions, especially in primary, as 'no-one in secondary school is going to

give them a chance' (Katy, primary SENCO). For others, making a difference was 'doing something of value to somebody else', and 'wanting to be in a caring profession and doing something that would make a difference to somebody really' (Frances, SEN tutor, primary).

The urge to 'make a difference' led to many of the respondents staying in education for a significant period of time. The final chapter of the findings will examine the emotional experiences of teachers over their careers and particularly why they stayed in the profession, some for over 30 years.

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CHAPTER TEN: 'I CAN'T IMAGINE DOING ANYTHING ELSE': WHY DO TEACHERS OF CHILDREN WITH SEN REMAIN IN THE PROFESSION? RESILIENCE AND REWARDS OVER TIME

The following findings illustrate the key themes determining why teachers remained in the profession, some for over 30 years. Day *et al.*'s research (2007) indicated that despite individual and work context differences, it is possible to discern distinctive key influences, tensions, shared professional and personal concerns (and emotions) relevant to most teachers in different phases of their careers. These current findings focus on those who have been teaching for 11 years or more (very loosely corresponding with Day's later phases of teaching) and look in particular at how professional, personal and situated events influence why people stay working in special educational needs for a significant length of time. Twenty of the sample of 32 had been teaching for over 11 years, and nine of these had taught for over 20 years (four of the nine for over 30 years).

The factors included the intellectual challenge of the work; the unique rewards of working with children with SEN; particular situated factors; and emotional influences in their personal lives.

i. *The intellectual challenge of working with children with SEN*

The intellectual demands of working with children with SEN often maintained teachers' commitment, together with maintaining other academic interests:

It is to me the most interesting area of education. I don't miss taking a whole class. I don't really miss the variety of subjects because I do work supporting year 3 children in their literacy and they're doing a theme, making reports or writing instructions. So as far as I'm concerned I can use creativity, we can write instructions, we can do things related to their topic so its up to me to make what I do interesting rather than me force feeding them, 'oh God, here we go again' kind of thing, doing full stops or that kind of thing. So I do like what I do, and having had that break from work, I feel that I am choosing to work. There hasn't been anything else that has made me think 'oh, I'd rather do that', not at the moment.

(Donna, primary SENCO, 16-19 years).

Some saw classroom work as less challenging but maintained their enthusiasm by combining work with keeping up academic work:

I've always tried to keep an intellectual side going as well as a working with the child, so I did a lot of journal writing for the Geographical Association and I've run workshops at their conferences and lectured for them and so on, about geography and SEN or a particular aspect of geography. I review for Aphasie *[a charity]*. I've written for Special

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Children [*a magazine*], I've done a couple geography text book series and things which I think is important because otherwise it gets to be a desperately narrow little world, and you don't keep sharp. You've got to keep asking yourself questions or you would just be so bored. (*Emily, primary SENCO, 30+ years*).

ii. *The unique rewards*

Despite very occasionally regretting working with children with SEN, many respondents didn't want to do anything else and discussed the unique emotional rewards experienced over time:

I wasn't qualified to do anything else so I was kind of lumbered with it, but I wouldn't do anything else, no, it's excellent. (*Andrea, primary SENCO, 16-19 years*).

For Frances, 'Nothing would give me the same rewards I don't think' (*Frances, SEN tutor, primary, 20+ years*), and for Siobhan, 'I love the job, I love the children, and I can't imagine wanting to do anything else' (*Siobhan, secondary SENCO, 15 years*).

For Alison, it was the 'buzz' of working in SEN that kept her going:

I do actually really get a buzz. It's selfish really but I do actually get a buzz when you go to something like a graduationso perhaps that's

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why I keep doing it. I get a buzz. I was very happy. (*Alison, secondary teacher and SENCO, 30+ years*).

iii. Situated factors

Rather than their individual work situations, many participants were focused on whole-school change, particularly for the systems that supported children with SEN. Some participants only moved on from a school when they had achieved as much as they could. They also liked appreciation for turning around difficult situations in SEN departments and had stayed due to particular factors in their school, as illustrated by Andrea:

If I do get to the stage if I can't make any difference [then I leave]. In my five years at the other school I almost felt I had got as far as I was going to get in that school. I set up a lot of things and things were running and some things weren't going to run and some people won't going to change, whatever, then I thought I can maybe need a slightly different challenge. I'm a person for challenges. I did turn down a good job that said that 'everything's running fine here, there's not a lot to do', and I didn't want to do that. There is something in my psychological makeup, if I felt that it all been done if I'd move and do it somewhere else... I was in a failing school and the previous SENCO was crap, absolutely crap, and so I liked going in, and you get satisfaction you feel like you're doing something and you're appreciated. Because they hadn't had it before. I took over from somebody, I don't blame her at all, she was off twice long-

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term because she had breast cancer and nobody is going to do a job well like that. But it did mean that I came to somewhere where they needed somebody so whatever I did whether it was a little bit or a lot, I would have been appreciated and I do like that. (*Andrea, primary SENCO, 16-19 years*).

iv. *Personal factors: money, health, holidays, parenthood, caring*

Respondents all had family obligations which meant that the flexibility of teaching suited them. Some also had health conditions which made it difficult for them to move on, even if they had wished to do so.

For Andrea, her family was her priority, and she would only leave if family life was affected:

I would leave if I knew it affected my children. I stay because it is a very rewarding role and it is not badly paid. It is part-time, term-time only. (*Andrea, primary SENCO, 16-19 years*).

Emily stayed working in SEN due to health reasons as well as having a family:

Well, [I stayed] partly due to going deaf. I have a severe to profound hearing loss now so my options are a lot limited. Age limits you, I think, but I would have stayed anyway. It's a niche I enjoy because I was able to be part-time. It meant I could be home by home-time when I needed to

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be with the younger children and work in the evening which is very important to me, especially with having one child with learning difficulties. I suppose my main motivation is that I always wanted to be a good parent first and a good parent to me is someone who is round within spitting distance of home time, if not on home time, and is available in the holidays and there aren't that many jobs that offer that so that was a big motivation for staying.

[...]

But it is a job I've hugely enjoyed and obviously, ones' pride likes to be asked advice and I get rung up by other schools asking 'What do I do about XYZ', which is always very flattering. I can't honestly think what else I could do that would bring in the same sort of money really so no, it's never been that bad. I did wonder when the autistic one [*former pupil*] was being so awful whether I could hang on for another few years or whether I can keep going and I thought 'well, he's being so foul now, I've got to stick it out for another couple of months', and the other thing is why should a child make me pack it in? I'm not having that, they've got to improve. (*Emily, primary SENCO, 30+ years*).

Despite occasionally thinking of leaving teaching, none had done so, particularly due to financial and personal factors:

SM: Have you ever thought of leaving teaching?

Yeah, frequently [laughs] especially since we had the new Head. I mean several of us did. If I could find something else that brought in the same

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amount of money and that had the same amount of hours, because obviously the holidays are a big plus. Until my change in circumstance I was the main wage-earner in this house because my husband was self employed and to actually make a decision having reached the upper pay scale to leave and find something else and find something equivalent was impossible. And there was always that question- will I be satisfied doing that? I might be able to earn the money but is it me, is it what I want to do? But I never come up with anything away. (*Frances, SEN tutor, primary, 20+years*).

For Charlotte, her own poor health and the death of close friends led to her reassessing her commitment to teaching, although she decided to stay in a different capacity:

[I stay because] it's my interest, my thing to do really. A couple of friends of the same age died a couple years ago and I just thought to myself, they've worked all their lives. In September I was 59 and I took my teaching pension even though I elected to carry on working. By December I found that I was ill so that's why I've had to have the year out. But losing two friends is quite a shock really, at that age...I thought 'there's a bit more to life than continue working' but I mean I do like the work, I miss going to work, and its been frustrating this year but I'm picking up the tutoring again and then if any supply comes from the support team or if anything crops up then I'll go for it.

SM: And you don't ever regret going into it?

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No, no, no, never...you still regret a few things that maybe I should have done, but no, it's been good really on the whole, I'm glad to say.

(Charlotte, teacher and former SENCO, 30+ years).

v. *The future? Five years' time*

It was when asking about their future plans that it became clear that respondents had a commitment to working with children with SEN. All of the respondents saw themselves working in SEN in some capacity in the future, and had only the occasional thought of leaving. Charlotte was the only respondent who had left for a while to do care work for two years. The respondents saw themselves involved variously in working with the Common Assessment Framework (a shared assessment and planning framework for use across all children's services in England); voluntary work; training; hospice work; headteacher; head of a unit for deaf and hearing impaired children or head of a unit for children with autistic spectrum disorders. All maintained their emotional commitment to children with SEN, as illustrated by Dierdra, Georgina and Andrea:

I would not want a job that didn't involve some kind of involvement with special needs...I can't imagine in five years time being in a job that didn't have something to do with special needs or where I didn't have an opportunity to champion the cause for special needs children. *(Dierdra, SENCO, 15 years).*

I shan't ever move away from special needs in one form or another. In five years time I'm hoping to be looking at early retirement actually [laughing] hopefully so I'm coming to the end of my career but I would think as long as I'm capable of it I would always be doing something with SEN kids *[sic]* even if it was on a voluntary basis and doing counselling with children that have emotional difficulties or something like that. So there wouldn't be any big change no despite all my whinging about it. *(Georgina, secondary SENCO, 30+ years).*

I think that I can actually see myself still here [in five years time] which is not something... I don't usually see myself as a long- term person but yes, I think the role is big enough here. It still might be a challenge and the changes that are happening, such as the CAF and all the locality work and all of that. This is a large school and I do think that we have a gap here. I do think there is a gap with the teacher training here and the students that we have here. I think that a lot of the students might come in for teaching practice with assumptions or they don't know about the role. I think I might like to go down that way a little bit or maybe do some teacher training or that kind of thing. *(Andrea, primary SENCO, 16-19 years).*

Alison illustrated the 'urge to serve'. For Alison, her resilience was maintained by putting events in the context of her own life, as well as being an advocate for children:

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[It is important for me to] be on the child's side really ...[I stay in teaching by] putting it in perspective of life experiences; it's only one part of a very big picture. It's holistic with the children; this is one part of my life... It's also very easy to over-value yourself, it's down to a lot of different factors[I have a] a very strong feeling that it's a bit like a seed and eventually it may not work now, but ten years later and the love you've given [will pay off]. It's like with your own children, they might be a horrible teenagers ...everything you've done actually does bear some sort of fruit...we get these moments in life and it'll move forward and [my teaching is] just a little bit on that road, so I've done the best I can and actually I'm comfortable with that. (*Alison, secondary teacher and SENCO, 30+ years*).

For all of the respondents, the potentially negative emotional effects of experiencing stressful work and life events (Mackenzie, 2011a) were managed and translated into positive personal and professional resources upon which these teachers could draw and benefit, when developing and sustaining their positive professional life trajectories over the course of their careers.

Like Day *et al.* (2007), some situated factors in particular schools were found to be influences which contributed positively and/or negatively to teachers' efficacy, commitment and perceived effectiveness. What was also important was the impact of critical influences on teachers and their effects in different phases of their professional lives (Day *et al.*, 2007). Such factors in this group included having children, salary requirements and flexible working patterns. The

findings demonstrated a similar pattern to those of Day *et al.*, (2007) in that commitment varied across professional life phases, although unlike Day *et al.*'s (admittedly much larger) sample, none showed a decrease in commitment or motivation.

To a large extent, the current sample demonstrated elements of sustained motivation, commitment and (as far as it was possible to ascertain) effectiveness (Day *et al.*, 2007). None showed decreased motivation or commitment, and it may be that the emotion-driven 'urge to serve' children with SEN was the factor that buoyed them in their careers. The intellectual challenge of the job and maintaining academic interests that complemented the job helped to increase and maintain motivation. More importantly, personal factors such as the flexibility of teaching, holidays and the salary were strong motivators in keeping people in teaching. For those working for more than 20 years, the teachers demonstrated a strong sense of motivation and commitment and none appeared to be losing their dedication to the profession.

The four staff in the 30 plus years professional life phase did not appear 'tired or trapped' as in Day *et al.*'s study, but maintained their commitment, even if it was to be in a voluntary capacity upon retirement. However, some did experience health issues that influenced what they wanted to do or could do. Therefore, situated factors, professional factors and personal factors all interact to enable people to be resilient across a teaching lifetime. In this study, professional factors such as a sense of vocation in SEN are distinct from the factors indicated in previous research. Wider school change was often the focus

i.e. change to systems supporting the needs of children with SEN, which you would expect from SENCOs, given their whole-school liaison functions.

Personal factors included health, balancing work with family and children; holidays; and the ability to take part-time and flexible work. Situated factors such as pupil characteristics, leadership and staff collegiality (Day *et al.*, 2007) were less significant in this study. All expressed a sense of vocation and a desire to 'serve' especially within inclusive classrooms. Surprisingly, given the general picture of poor teacher retention, all wanted to stay working with children with SEN, although admittedly not necessarily in the classroom, and many respondents were focused more on wider change within the system beyond the classroom.

Despite the lack of discussion of situated factors, many did describe a variety of positive and emotion-charged teaching events which may also have added to the reasons for staying (Mackenzie, 2011a). All saw themselves as remaining working with children with SEN in five years' time, although perhaps in different capacities. Teachers pointed to the unique rewards of working in SEN and all wanted to remain involved, even those who had been in the profession for more than 30 years.

vi. Summary

The teachers in this study appeared to demonstrate a high degree of resilience across their careers, and exhibited a huge commitment to working with children with SEN. This latter factor motivated them throughout their careers. The

findings may be unsurprising, given the self-selecting nature of the sample.

However, it is still noteworthy how and why such teachers maintained resilience for more than 15 years, and in some case for more than 30 years.

It is interesting to acknowledge respondent's desire to move into wider roles within special education, which suggests that further professional development for leadership may be needed, particularly given SENCOs' widening role in the school (Mackenzie, 2007; Yonezawa *et al.*, 2011). It is crucial for schools to tap into this deeply-felt commitment to stay in education and to explore what factors help or hinder this. The implication of this research is that teachers may need different kinds of support at different life phases: at 15 or 16 years of teaching, they may require more practical strategies such as part-time and flexible work to help meet the needs of work and family; at 20-plus years of teaching, support around health issues and sustaining and keeping motivation become paramount (see also Muller *et al.*, 2011 on these factors). At this later stage in teachers' careers, it is important to consider ways in which teachers' expertise, commitment to children with SEN and dedication to improving the wider special education system can be harnessed and kept within education. This may mean support for leadership roles (Yonezawa *et al.*, 2011). It could be argued that some have had no choice but to maintain resilience given the salary, flexibility, holidays and lack of other options, all of which had encouraged them to stay in teaching. Further research on those to whom it could be said feel 'gently trapped' in the role would be beneficial.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: CRITIQUING AND CONCLUDING THE STUDY

Section One: Examining the Tools

i. Structure of the chapter

This chapter will begin by examining the usefulness of the methodological tools used within the dissertation. It will then address the findings of Aims One to Three. The final sections will conclude the study and address the methodological limitations. It will then make recommendations arising from the findings for policy and for future research.

The project concludes that emotionally-charged critical incidents in respondents' work experience and personal life determine their decision to work with children with SEN. Despite the difficulties encountered, their emotional experiences within the job encourage and reinforce their decision to stay working in this area. Respondents often stayed in their role for many years (and none intended to leave the profession) due to lifestyle and personal factors; situated factors in particular schools; and the 'urge to serve'. The conclusion is summarised in Figure 5.

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ii. *Limitations of life history research*

Life history research (like other research) is never a smooth process, due to the complicated and non-linear nature of people's lives, referred to earlier. The process of people's lives is not a calm, straightforward course; the path is full of twists and turns, and so the self is simultaneously made and unmade (Halse, 2010; Grundy and Hatton, 1998). Therefore, there is a danger that a dissertation such as this attempts to artificially 'smooth' the lives of the respondents.

One of the limitations of life history research is that the 'repertoire of plot structures' used to construct teachers' career stories has narrowed (Pomson, 2004, p. 647). Teachers' career patterns do not necessarily pursue a narrative chronology with a beginning, middle and end, and so again, the element of trying to add a degree of narrative structure to teachers' lives may have some artificiality.

The wealth of career stories that have resulted from previous life history research on teachers have suffered from a dearth of plots. Two plots tend to dominate the literature: a 'tragic archetype' in which committed individuals are ground down by an inhospitable educational system (Pomson, 2004, p.649) and the other, a 'romantic archetype' (p. 649) in which heroic individuals overcome against all odds the challenges faced by the education system. These is unsurprising given that career stories are generic narratives like others (such as detective stores and fairytales) and therefore conform to certain conventions,

characters and roles and relationships (see also Clandinin and Connolly (2000) on the 'Hollywood plot'). They tend to draw on a small set of readily available plots with which people constructed their scripted stories (Pomson, 2004), and so life histories tend to be 'sad tales' or 'survivor tales' (Pomson, 2004, p. 650).

The open-endedness of most life-history interviews also encourages subjects to employ narrative archetypes that conform to conventional narratives. Inevitably, respondents script their careers as moving on a familiar journey from 'once-upon-a-time postulant to present-day practitioner' (Pomson, 2004, p. 650).

Pomson advocates reconstructing life histories around themes that may layer past, present and future together, rather than presume a linear life-course.

Along these lines, there was an element of predictability in the linear narratives told by the participants in this study; to a large degree they did follow the convention of the 'romantic archetype' in that they overcame challenges against the odds. This sometimes led to similar narratives: events in childhood or early career, which had varying degrees of dramatic intensity, led to a commitment to working with children with SEN. In early to mid-career, a variety of challenges were faced by respondents, both personal and professional. These were almost invariably overcome, with older respondents using these challenges as resources to draw on to increase their resilience and reinforce their 'urge to serve' (see p.232 on redemption stories).

Additionally, life history research has been accused of constructing a celebratory account of teachers' lives, and constructing a particularly positive

discourse (Hargreaves, 2006, p. 13). Teachers' voices are also used to speak of, and for, all teachers, and Hargreaves warns against this totalising effect (Hargreaves, 2006). Furthermore, individualistic accounts of teachers' lives neglect the social and political as well as personal dimensions of their work (Grundy and Hatton, 1998) and similarly in this study it was unusual for teachers to refer to any wider social, political or economic dimensions to their work or lives, which adds to the charges of solipsism and narcissism in narrative research.

Critics point to the highly subjective nature of life history research, and the limitations of relying on a single informant. One problem is the potential flight into individualism, and so it is important to guard against seeing the respondents as isolated from the wider context (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). I attempted to place the respondents' work within particular geographical and socio-economic contexts, and also look at the gendered nature of work in SEN (see Chapter 7), although this may have a degree of post-hoc justification as respondents did not always refer overtly to these dimensions of their lives.

In practical terms, life history research was time consuming, considering the processes involved in collecting the data, transcribing and developing analyses. Rapport and empathy with the respondents was essential, and not everyone has the interpersonal skills to do this. In this study, rapport happened to varying degrees with the different respondents, and this may have had an influence on the quality of data collected. It can also be argued that 'fake friendship' was developed, and much life history work has been criticised for attempting to

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establish false relationships with respondents to encourage them to disclose more personal details (Holland, 1997) (see ethics section, p. 119).

iii. Superficiality of responses

The initial analysis of the interview data demonstrated that the responses were somewhat superficial, perhaps due to: time constraints; unfamiliarity with the researcher; the topic: the questions; or other unknown factors. There was a lack of response to some questions, and a relatively superficial reflection from the respondents (although this is a problem with the questions, and the interview situation, rather than a problem with the respondents themselves).

The first round of focus groups and interviews produced different types of data. Evidently, the focus group data was a product of the interactions between participants which had a different quality to the face-to-face interviews. There was perhaps a trade-off here: focus groups elicited less individual, detailed responses but the interaction could arguably have sparked off more novel responses than an individual interview could have done.

As the research progressed, it became difficult to schedule another focus group after the first four and I also felt that theoretical saturation was being reached. No respondents from the three advertisements placed in the special needs press said that they were willing to come to a focus group. Therefore, I concentrated on refining the life history approach, and adapted the questions to

focus in on the issues that appeared to be salient from the initial analysis of the focus group and interview data.

Each group and interview mentioned 'making a difference' (explored in Chapter 9) but on occasions this remained unexplored (seven responses) as it was only when reading the transcripts that this issue appeared significant to me; this demonstrates an advantage of a narrative, qualitative approach i.e. it highlights novel incidents not considered by the researcher but also a limitation: it is highly dependent upon the sensitivity of the researcher to be able to discern significant patterns from the mass of data.

The vignettes did not create much discussion (see Appendix vi). They were aimed at uncovering what respondents thought of the SENCO role but perhaps the case studies were not accurate representations of the role; perhaps respondents took such different paths that they could not identify with them.

iv. Analysis of the data

Focus groups can give rise to an anecdotal approach, for example presenting extracts from the transcript from field notes to exemplify the group exchanges. Researchers seldom give criteria or grounds for including some extracts rather than others; therefore it is difficult to judge the representativeness of these quotations without looking at the whole transcript. Also, it can be argued that research reports presented as summaries, for example in thematic tables (as in Chapters 7 to 10), do not preserve the materials upon which the analysis was

conducted. The original form of the material is lost, and therefore alternative explanations cannot be derived by other readers (Silverman, 2003). These weaknesses may give rise to a tendency to select the data to fit an ideal conception of the phenomena being studied and a tendency to select field data because they are exotic, at the expense of less dramatic (but perhaps more typical) data. The representativeness or generality of the focus group fragments that are presented in the study may therefore be questioned.

There are additional features to be considered when data have been collected through focus group discussions. The group dynamics led to non-verbal communications, which were noted immediately after the discussion.

Interactions between group members are also part of the data, and the ways in which the interactions took place were a useful source of information. The level and coverage of each participant was uneven, as members spoke at various lengths on different topics. There was also less depth of coverage of each respondent, as compared to an individual interview, as time will be shared between all participants in the group. Other views also influenced what was said, as participants modified, refined or extended what they said in the light of other contributions. This may have led to new and interesting responses but individualised contributions were less detailed, due to the nature of the focus group method.

The next section will summarise the findings of the project in relation to each of the research aims. Figure 5 indicates the findings of the project.

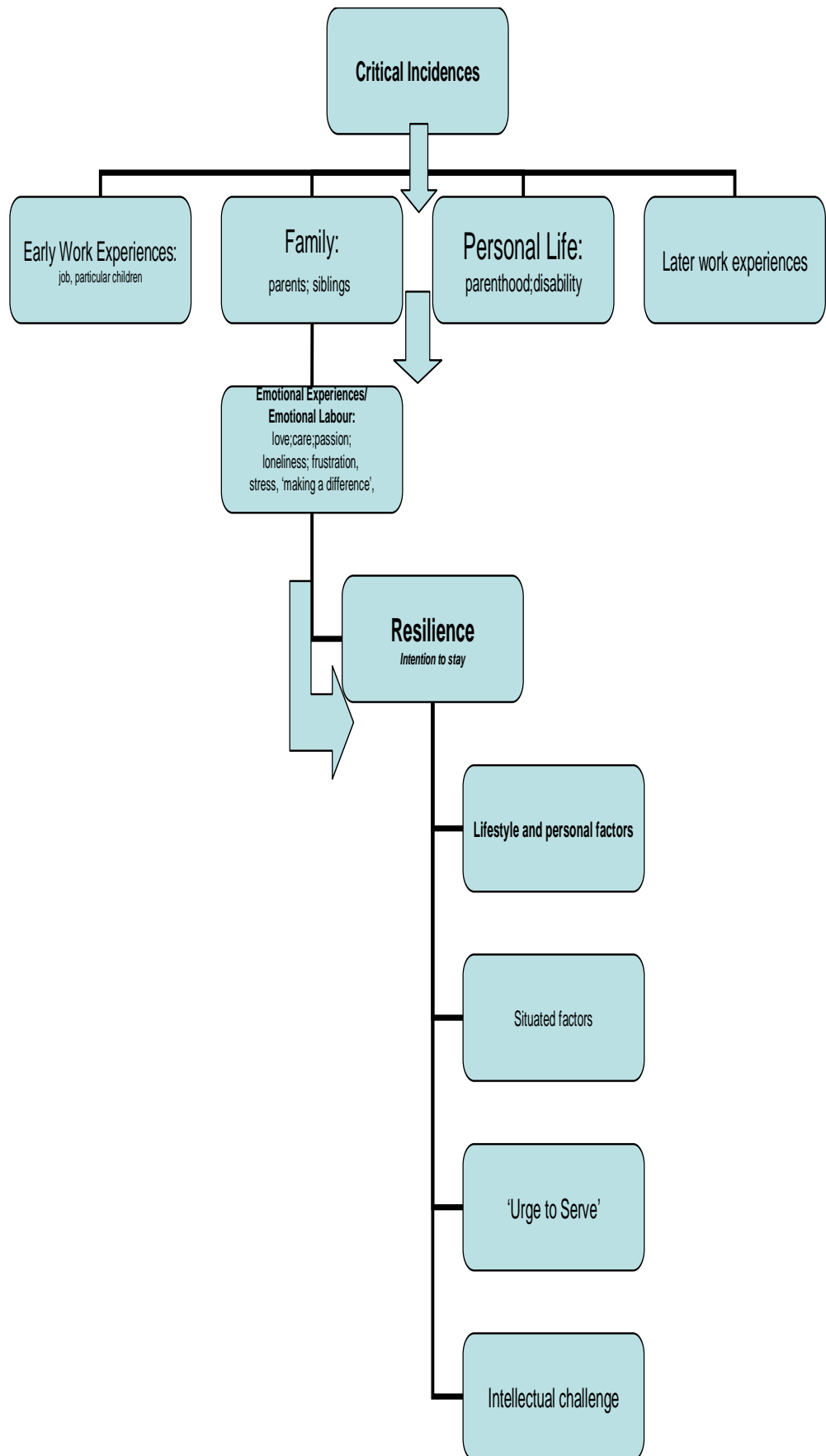


Figure 5:
Overview and
conclusion

Section Two: Examining Aim One

To discover teachers' perceptions of the SENCO role.

I have demonstrated how SENCOs carry out their role in diverse settings, with considerable variations in how the role is interpreted. This makes generalisation about the role difficult. SENCOs' work varies according to factors such as: setting i.e. primary or secondary; time allocation; membership of the senior leadership team and whether or not they have other responsibilities (Oldham and Radford, 2011). Research has pointed consistently to the breadth of the SENCO role, with many feeling that they are being asked to do the impossible (Lingard, 2001).

It has been noted that since 1994, the SENCO role has widened. From the existing research, it is known that SENCO workload is frequently unmanageable (see Lingard 2001, for example, on the demands of IEPs). In the future, given the proposed reforms to the SEN system (Great Britain. Department for Education, 2011) it should be possible for a TA to take over more of the administrative aspects of the role, currently so burdensome to SENCOs, thus allowing the SENCO to spend more time working on strategic teaching and learning matters and TA training.

Given the current focus upon measurable pupil outcomes, SENCOs often feel undervalued and unappreciated because the difference they make is not visible

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or capable of being measured. More research into the effectiveness of SENCOs is required (see Recommendations, p.235).

Section Three: Examining Aim Two

To analyse critical incidents as reasons for working with children with SEN.

The research indicates that critical events in early work experience appear to be the greatest influences on whether someone will pursue a career working as a SENCO. These events included working in a particular borough; working with parents; and encounters with pupils with particular needs. To a lesser degree, experience when younger is significant for SENCOs (voluntary work, or having a sibling with SEN, for example); perhaps this early experience leaves a greater mark and leads to a desire to change provision on a wider scale, which the SENCO position may facilitate. Critical events in a teacher's personal life are also significant, especially becoming a parent, particularly of a child with SEN.

Section Four: Examining Aim Three

To explore the emotional reasons for wanting to work with children with SEN: family experiences, expectations of a female 'caring' role and work experience.

i. Emotional experiences

The emotional experiences associated with working with children with SEN, and the subsequent emotional rewards, appeared to be the main reasons why teachers continue to work in this area. Although little research has been carried

out on the emotional labour and emotion work specifically associated with working with children with SEN, this study has found, perhaps unsurprisingly, that teachers' emotional experiences are complex. Teachers experienced positive emotions, but ambivalently; this was counterbalanced by the exhaustion felt by such emotional labour. Often, relationships with colleagues were draining and frustrating. It appears that 'reciprocal emotion management' can be undertaken by staff to help them cope with the emotional demands of their jobs (Lively, 2000). There is some evidence of this 'reciprocal emotion management' between SENCOs in this current research, with respondents talking about the importance of local SENCO networks for emotional support. Staff created opportunities for caring relationships to develop (Lopez, 2009).

Although more negative emotional experiences were a significant feature of the study, 'love' was the most frequently coded emotion (39 times across 12 respondents) with respondents expressing love of their job or of their pupils, for example. Six respondents emphasised the importance of 'care' to their work, with one teacher seeing care as the top reason for wanting to work in SEN.

There was a gendered dimension to the way respondents discussed the idea of 'caring', which may reflect the largely female nature of the sample. Most participants were parents and often talked about the 'maternal' aspects of the role. Participants felt that women were generally more suited to working with children with due to their 'motherly' qualities. Most did not see this as a problem, and were perhaps drawing on their own experiences as parents which informed their classroom activities.

Despite expressing the importance of positive emotions, it was evident that respondents also carried out emotion work and emotional labour through managing emotions, hiding negative emotions, and experiencing the physical and mental toll of challenging work. Hiding difficult emotions was often the most challenging aspect of the job and this emotional dissonance (Wharton, 2009) appeared to be draining for respondents. Aspects of working with children with SEN were seen as demanding and appeared to be particular to SEN rather than other aspects of working in schools. For example, respondents described the greater need for liaison with other colleagues as an aspect of the work that was significantly more demanding than other previous roles due to the often reluctant responses of other staff (O'Connor, 2008).

Those responses that explicitly mentioned stress as a factor in their working lives often focused on colleagues, particular school settings, the physical aspects of stress and supporting children with particular needs. The uniquely stressful aspects of working in SEN were often emphasised such as staff attitudes to inclusion and the frustrations of working with particular pupils.

Others discussed the lonely nature of work in mainstream schools. Because of job intensification and lack of non-teaching time, teachers had little opportunity to liaise with colleagues which lead to feelings of isolation. SENCOs in particular felt isolated and felt that they had no-one to share problems or experiences with, and this appeared to increase the longer they were in the post for a small number of SENCOs. SENCOs were likely to express strong

emotions (both positive and negative emotions) and it appears that as a group, they experience extreme highs and lows of the teaching experience. They were also likely to discuss the physical and emotional demands of the role (Table 3).

In summary, this study echoes recent research on emotional labour but also demonstrates the positive emotional aspects of working with children with SEN (expressions of care, love and passion, for example) and these rewards were often felt to outweigh the more challenging aspects of the role. Emotions were not felt unambiguously and were often mediated by personal experience in respondents' private lives and biography. There is also evidence presented in this current study of the more negative emotional impact that working in SEN particularly brings: physical and emotional strains; the impact of isolation from colleagues; a perception that one needs to hide emotions (also found by Hargreaves, 2005; Winograd, 2003; and Sachs and Blakemore, 1998); and the 'rollercoaster' of policy changes that can lead to uncertainty and frustration.

ii. Rewards associated with teaching children with SEN

It should be noted that some respondents mentioned more than one reward from teaching, as might be expected. It appears that 'making a difference' to children with SEN in this study largely meant making a difference to their academic progress (as in Day *et al.*'s study, 2007). Respondents mentioned more than one source of satisfaction and 'made a difference' in multiple ways. This was to be predicted; but what notable was the longer a respondent had been working with children with SEN, the more likely they were to find

rewards in being an advocate for pupils and parents, perhaps reflecting their greater status and confidence in their work.

‘Academic progress’ as a reward may seem apparent, but for teachers of children with SEN this focuses on very fine, detailed individual work and ‘small steps’. It is acknowledged that the small sample size means that only tentative conclusions can be drawn. Despite this caveat, the initial findings indicate that academic rewards were the most common reward mentioned by SENCOs and teachers. Thirteen of the respondents mentioned ‘making a difference’ in terms of academic rewards (which may not be surprising given the emphasis in schools on teachers’ promotion of academic achievement).

Teachers experienced a variety of rewards within teaching children with SEN: see for example the multiple understandings of ‘making a difference’, ranging from academic rewards to improving self-confidence and carrying out an advocacy role.

Much previous research has emphasised the less rewarding aspects of the job such as workload and the amount of time spent on aspects of working with children with SEN. In contrast, many respondents in this study were more concerned with the rewards of their work; ‘making a difference’ was conceptualised as facilitating small steps in attainment; having an advocacy role; developing relationships on a one-to-one level; and confidence-building.

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iii. Parenthood and gender

Parenthood was another factor that encouraged people to work with children with SEN, and once working in the area, these emotional experiences and practical factors ensured that they stayed. As mentioned above, parenthood and gender were significant factors in determining respondents' emotional experiences in working with children with SEN.

There is a well-documented caring discourse around teaching which this study supports. Practically, teaching was seen as being relatively easy to fit into family life. Furthermore, parenthood was often a motivator for entering teaching. This study found that when having children, the practicalities of a career in teaching were helpful but having a child with SEN, or other relatives with disabilities, led to a desire to improve the system and was a further motivator to entering the profession. Some participants held an essentialist view of male and female teachers, seeing women as more 'caring', whereas men were seen as more suited to being 'disciplinarians'. These traditional gender roles were questioned by only one respondent, and generally, women's supposedly more maternal natures were seen as positive resources to be drawn upon. The possibility that these views might help to reproduce quite traditional gender roles (Zhang, 2008), or have an impact upon children's views of male and female teachers, remained unexplored in this study.

iv. *Why stay? The emotional commitment over time*

It should be noted that the respondents did not all have an idealised view of their roles; some respondents were realistic about the lack of other suitable career possibilities. From the findings, there was a sense that the salary and lack of opportunities had meant that respondents had to make the best of their role. Yet above and beyond this (and perhaps a compensatory factor) was the commitment to meeting children's needs.

For all of the respondents, the potentially negative effects of experiencing stressful work and life events (discussed in Mackenzie, 2011a) were managed and translated into positive personal and professional resources upon which these teachers could draw and benefit, when developing and sustaining their positive professional life trajectories over the course of their careers.

In summary, situated factors, professional factors and personal factors all interact to enable people to be resilient across a teaching lifetime. In this study, professional factors such as a sense of vocation in SEN are distinct from the factors indicated in previous research. Wider school change was often the focus i.e. change to systems supporting the needs of children with SEN, which you would expect from SENCOs, given their whole-school liaison functions. Personal factors included health, balancing work with family and children, holidays and the ability to take part-time and flexible work. Situated factors such as pupil characteristics, leadership and staff collegiality (Day *et al.*, 2007) were less significant in this study. All expressed a sense of vocation and a

desire to 'serve' especially within inclusive classrooms. Surprisingly, given the general picture of poor teacher retention, all wanted to stay working with children with SEN, although admittedly not necessarily in the classroom; and many respondents were focused more on wider change within the system beyond the classroom.

Section Five: Concluding the study

Critiquing the limitations of the study

This section of the chapter will examine the limitations of the study, namely: the operationalising of concepts and conceptual confusion; representativeness and generalisability; the problem of 'unreliable narrators' and predictable plots; and ethical problems.

i. Problems in operationalising 'emotions'

As has been noted, a diversity of emotional experiences were described by the respondents in the study, from more positive experiences of care and love, to darker emotions such as anger, isolation, loneliness and frustration. They also felt pressure regarding the 'expertism discourse' which relates special educational needs to notions of personal pathology or deficit that require a 'specialist' pedagogy lacking in mainstream schools (Avramidis *et al.*, 2002). However, these emotions are obviously not felt in the same way by all people, and may be difficult to define (Sutton and Wheatley, 2003). The same emotion,

for example 'loneliness', will have different meanings for each respondent, which adds to the difficulty in drawing conclusions about teachers' emotional experiences of work (Hurley, 2007). To obtain a more complete picture of teachers' emotions, future research could also include measures that extend beyond self-report such as observations and physical and physiological measures. The methodological limitations when studying emotions means that caution must be applied when generalising about the experience of working in SEN (Reio, 2005).

ii. Representativeness and generalisability

Given the sample size, drawing generalised conclusions should be approached with caution. Furthermore, the results presented cannot be taken to be representative, given that it is a sample of 32 respondents based in England only. In addition, frequency of response regarding the importance of different motivating factors does not necessarily indicate the importance of that motivator, and further research is needed to weigh up the relative strength of motivating factors.

iii. Conceptual confusion: 'making a difference'

Seventeen respondents pointed to 'making a difference' as the greatest reward they experienced in teaching. However, seven respondents mentioned 'making a difference' but did not expand on the concept and so their understanding of this term is unclear. Perhaps it was so obvious and taken-for-granted by the

respondents that they felt that it did not need explaining? Alternatively, for some of the respondents, this lack of exploration may be an artefact of the focus groups; perhaps the discussion did not allow them the opportunity to explore their understandings of 'making a difference'.

It should also be noted that 'making a difference' is a socially acceptable response to asking teachers what rewards they experience; it has become part of an accepted narrative of teaching, so much so that some respondents did not feel the need to explore it in any detail.

iv. Problems of life history research: Unreliable narrators?

The results are also dependent upon the accuracy of respondents' memories, and it may have been less straightforward for those with over 20 years experience to recall exactly why they began working with children with SEN. Given that the tendency for us to construct a selective narrative of our own lives, it could be argued that the respondents are unreliable narrators, although the construction of particular narratives is itself useful and worthy of study. It could also be argued that the sample is self-selecting, and that those responding to the request to take part in the research had more concrete, considered and reflective reasons for deciding to work as SENCOs. This can perhaps be illustrated by those who argued that they 'fell into' working with children with SEN (only four respondents) whereas the proportions in the education population who would describe this career pattern would perhaps be larger. The responses could also reflect the social acceptability of particular

responses, with very few participants admitting they had drifted into teaching children with SEN or had other less positive reasons for doing so.

Finally, given that respondents were told the broad focus of the research well in advance, it could be argued that they had more time to reflect upon their own motivations and construct a more 'tidier' narrative account of their careers than is actually the case (see the 'Hollywood plot', where everything turns out well in the end (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 181)).

Questions can be raised about the reliability of respondents' life histories. Sometimes, researchers employ some type of respondent validation (or 'member check'), showing their interpretations and writings to those they concern and offering the opportunity for comment or even alteration (although this strategy was not taken in this study for practical reasons). This raises the difficult issue of who 'owns' the lives that I wrote about. On the one hand, as an academic writer, I have a responsibility to make interpretations, but I could not write if those lives hadn't been shared. So, it is an ongoing and unresolved question regarding who 'owns' the 'final' version of these lives.

For Sikes (2010), there are no easy answers to these issues. In any case, some respondents do not always want to read the accounts due to lack of time, interest, or they trust the academics to write ethically or responsibly about them. Additionally, respondent validation may not be an option if respondents are dead, or change their contact addresses, for example. In this study, participants

were sent aspects of the research although they did not respond or offer any commentary and so respondent validation was not achieved to any degree.

As noted in the methodology, narrative lives are not, and cannot be, the life as lived; when people tell their stories, they are making a choice about what to put in and what to leave out and also what emphasis to make and words to use in order to create a particular impression. When I wrote up the stories, I too was making the same sort of decisions and I ended up presenting and privileging a version that served my purpose; it is possible that I cut and sliced data to fit the story (known as 'Cinderella's slipper syndrome' (Sikes, 2010, p.18)).

Problems of life history research: Redemption stories

Questions can be raised about how consistent a life history is, and the extent to which it is a reliable or 'true' account. Previous sections have noted the 'constructed' nature of lives as told, and this section will explore this further. A person's life is always a work in progress, therefore it is expected that a life history will change markedly over time (McAdams and Olson, 2010). It should not be surprising that respondents revise and rework their life stories in light of their changing psychosocial concerns in the later adult years and in the context of what the future may bring (McAdams, 2001). McAdams *et al.* (2006) found that key events in a person's life story were not recalled three months later, and even fewer were mentioned three years later (see also McAdams, 2001 on the problems of inaccurate recollection within life histories). More distant events tend to be reconstructive rather than reproductive (McAdams, 2001).

Longitudinal inconsistencies have also been noted (McAdams and Olsen, 2010), and (as could be expected) for middle-aged respondents, life stories become more complex and encompass a greater number of themes suggesting personal growth and integration. This is partly due to what has been called 'autobiographical reasoning' which is the tendency to draw summary conclusions about the self from autobiographical episodes (McAdams and Olson, 2010).

Life turning-points tend to be mentioned more as respondents enter middle age, and middle-aged adults show a more interpretive and psychologically complex approach to telling their life story compared to younger people. Older adults also tend to use more positive language and describe more positive learning experiences than do younger respondents. Older adults can therefore have a positivity memory bias (in McAdams and Olson, 2010) and to a large extent this was true of this study (see previous section on p. 213 regarding the story arc of 'triumphs over challenges').

There is also a tendency for adults to see their lives in terms of redemption (McAdams, 2010). Although McAdams sees this as a particularly American trait, parallels can be seen in the life histories presented in this study. In particular, respondents tended to tell their stories in terms of redemption sequences, where they were delivered from suffering to an enhanced state. (See also Campbell (1949) on 'the hero's journey', a pattern which most story-telling follows.) Respondents tended to see their lives in terms of an early life event or struggle, and/or a recognition of and sensitivity to the suffering of others, and a

desire towards achieving goals that benefit society in the future. In particular, respondents tend to want to give back to society for the blessings they have received in their early lives. MacAdams sees these types of stories as typical of American respondents who tend to see their lives in terms of redemptive tales of atonement, emancipation, recovery, self-fulfillment and upward social mobility, with an emphasis on heroic individual protagonists, and many of the respondents in this study expressed their stories in this way, although perhaps not cast in such a dramatic manner.

Problems of life history research: ethics

Presenting a version of someone's life inevitably raises ethical issues of *how* that life is presented. I tried to bear in mind Sikes' (2010) bottom-line test: how would I feel if I, members of my family or my friends were to be involved and treated and written about in the way the research in question involves or treats or depicts its participants? Researchers have the power to create versions of reality. Even when I acknowledged that there is no single 'truth'; I am still making a claim to present a legitimate and authentic account of other people's lives. This was a big dilemma in my research: I attempted to present 'authentic' accounts whilst also recognising that the study reflects my own interpretations of the significant events in that life.

In addition, life histories freeze, fix and stop the clock on those teachers' lives and on our interpretations as well, therefore, but the very nature of this kind of research, the person's life becomes presented in a fixed and unchanging way.

Recommendations arising from the study

Despite these limitations, the research does highlight areas of interest regarding wider education policy and future research policies. This section will focus on recommendations for future policy developments and research in this area.

i. The role of the SENCO: Effectiveness

The scope of this study did not allow for a detailed examination of how effective SENCOs are and if particular motivations to enter the profession affect their degree of effectiveness. Given the current focus upon measurable pupil outcomes, SENCOs often feel undervalued and unappreciated because the difference they make is not visible or capable of being measured. More research into the effectiveness of SENCOs is required. For example, it is worth considering whether the SENCO has the specialist expertise needed to put in place systems to improve teaching and learning such as interventions for literacy, dyspraxia, behaviour management, social skills training for pupils with Asperger's syndrome and so on. Do such programmes work, and if so, should the SENCO be delivering them, or is all that is required someone to carry out the administrative requirements of the role while pupils follow the same curriculum as everyone else? It may be useful for the TDA to initiate a review of the role and the many demands upon it, and should also examine further what skills the SENCO needs to have (Great Britain. Training and Development Agency, 2011). An evaluation of the nationally accredited training courses for SENCOs could focus on the role that CPD plays in SENCO effectiveness.

There have even been arguments that the SENCO role could become redundant. It has been suggested that the role has now become too demanding for one person; it may be more appropriate for the function of SEN co-ordination to be split over several middle and senior management job roles (such as deputy head) (Norwich, 2010) . This distribution of SENCO functions would then make the role as embodied in a single person obsolete.

The strands embedded within the training for new SENCOs implicitly appear to advocate certain areas for evaluation of the role: Professional Context; Strategic Development; Co-ordinating Provision; Leading, Developing and Supporting Colleagues; and Working in Partnership (Hallett and Hallett, 2010). However, no explicit evaluation of individual effectiveness within these areas has been developed; perhaps due to the ambiguity about what areas are an individual SENCO's responsibility and what remain as whole-school issues. There are few explicit criteria for the evaluation of the SENCO role in any policy document; perhaps due to this lack of clarity about SENCO responsibilities: are they also responsible for providing for pupils with additional needs and gifted and talented pupils? Is the SENCO the 'hub' for the delivery of 'Every Child Matters'? Are SENCOs senior leaders, or is the responsibility for pupils with SEN distributed? (Hallett and Hallett, 2010). These questions, together with the expected variation within individual schools regarding how they co-ordinate SEN provision, makes it difficult to know exactly what SENCOs should do beyond being a qualified teacher, undergoing the compulsory training and having a strategic position. The very broad scope of recent research, such as Hallett and

Hallett (2010), demonstrates that responsibility for pupils with SEN can be diffuse in some schools; the SENCO role is wide in scope.

ii. How can this research aid the development of effectiveness measures?

In the absence of explicit measures to assess SENCO effectiveness, this research may aid in the development of tools in this area. There could be a convergence between a SENCO feeling that they 'make a difference' (Chapter Nine) and some form of external measure of effectiveness. From respondents' own views, 'making a difference' means:

- Raising pupil achievement: This may most obviously be addressed through the school Self Evaluation Framework; performance management; and data analysis such as Fischer Family Trust data, P Scale data, RAISEOnline and so on;
- Being an 'advocate': It is more difficult to see how this could be assessed; through parental questionnaires, perhaps, or children's feedback;
- Increasing pupil confidence: this may be measured through, for example, the Boxall Profile (2011).

So, taken together, it is possible to see that respondent's own self-evaluation criteria as expressed in this study could be translated into effectiveness measures, although all of the above suggestions have issues around validity

and reliability. (It should be noted that some of the above suggestions may already be addressed individually through performance management.) However, the suggestions above may have an element of credibility given that they are taken from respondent's own feelings about how they believe their effectiveness could be assessed; the measures could perhaps be used as a form of self-assessment or continuing professional development, or (presumably less popularly) embedded into the new Ofsted framework (Great Britain. Office for Standards in Education, 2011).

The new Ofsted inspection framework will explicitly address the academic performance and progress of pupils with SEN (Great Britain. Office for Standards in Education, 2011), looking at how SENCOs know why pupils have (or have not) made progress. Data on pupil progress and pupil's Record of Need (RoN) will need to be recorded, and lesson plans will have to note who is on the RoN. In this study, SENCO's interest and discussion of individual pupils is useful for meeting the requirements of the new Ofsted framework, which expects SENCOs to be able to produce detailed case studies of individual pupil's progress.

It should be noted, however, that developing such effectiveness criteria is difficult; it is problematic (and arguably unfair) to evaluate the SENCO role in isolation from whole-school provision, given that meeting the needs of children with SEN is a whole-school issue and the responsibility of all teachers (Great Britain. Department of Education and Skills, 2001). Until the exact nature of the role is specified (if this is indeed possible, given the divergence in how schools

meet the needs of children with SEN) it may be difficult to construct any valid or reliable 'measure' of SENCO effectiveness, even if such a measure is desirable.

iii. The role of the SENCO: Policy changes

Although no respondents in this study referred to leaving the profession, it is possible that the increased demands of policy initiatives such as Every Child Matters (Great Britain. Department for Education and Skills, 2003) may lead to an increase in those leaving special needs work. This would replicate the trend in America, where policy changes have led to a shortage of special educationalists. The tensions and frustrations referred to in the study could threaten the successful delivery of policy, as effective multi-agency working and strong intra-school relationships are vital to the delivery of policy on a day-to-day basis. Recognition of the particular challenges of working in schools with high numbers of pupils with SEN is needed within policy if the currently committed but overstretched workforce is to be retained.

iv. Emotions and teaching: developing resilience

It appears that dealing with difficult emotions becomes easier the longer one has been in post (despite some evidence of greater isolation) and therefore consideration needs to be given to supporting teachers earlier in their career, when they may not yet have developed the tools to withstand the emotional impact of working with children with SEN. The study also suggests that particular (demanding) personal and emotional characteristics are needed to

remain working in SEN: resilience; the ability to cope with isolation; dealing with the frustrations and expectations of other staff; facing the demands of the complex needs of pupils; managing the distress caused by pupil illness; and the ability to plate-spin and ball-juggle in a time of constant policy change.

Respondents expressed frustration with what they perceived as unending revisions to the legislative and policy framework and felt tensions between policy initiatives and their practice in the classroom such as: tensions between their classroom teaching roles and the demands of paperwork; meeting the needs of the whole class and also the requirements of individual children; and moves to whole-school inclusion whilst maintaining a category-based 'expertism discourse' that expected staff to have specialist knowledge in every area of SEN. Further longitudinal study of the particular nature of emotion work within SEN would be worthwhile, particularly as more policy change appears to be on the horizon (Great Britain. Department for Education, 2011). There needs to be support to encourage staff resilience to ensure that the emotionally rewarding aspects of the work, which appear to do so much to retain staff within the profession, do not become subsumed by policy changes, the demands of colleagues and isolation.

v. *Research on emotional labour*

The emotional labour carried out by teachers in relation to their co-workers is a possible area for future research, and has so far been neglected.

It may be more useful to look at the way that more positive interactions and rewards strengthen a teachers' commitment to their job, rather than previous approaches which stress reducing the more negative aspects (e.g. lack of time, paperwork and so on) (Kitching *et al.*, 2009). This could be a particularly fruitful approach for teachers at the beginning of their career, where stressful experiences are common. It can be seen that teachers can live with negative aspects of their job (Mackenzie, 2011b; 2011d; 2011e) as long as there are concurrent positive outcomes and rewards such as seeing children's achievement, working with parents, building confidence and being an advocate for pupils.

vi. *Recruitment and retention*

There are implications from the findings for policy around teacher recruitment and retention. Teaching was generally seen by participants as family-friendly, but particularly for those with children with SEN more flexibility is needed around childcare to attract older women who have useful life experience that can be drawn on in teaching.

A longitudinal understanding of how rewards develop for teachers across their careers could perhaps add to efforts to retain teachers, particularly in the context of an ageing profession. An understanding and encouragement of the

value of everyday rewards in teaching may help to maintain them in teaching.

The forthcoming changes to SEN legislation in England (Great Britain.

Department for Education, 2011) should aim to ensure that the work of teachers and SENCOs is focused on the areas that they find the most rewarding and that they believe are of most benefit to pupils and parents.

If, as this research suggests, early work experiences are the most significant determinant of a career in SEN, support at this point in teachers' careers together with facilitating a wider range of experiences working with children with SEN for teachers would result in more staff working in this area and becoming the SENCOs of the future.

Future research could also focus on whether different motivations lead to greater longevity within teaching. Longitudinal research could examine whether the nature of the interest in SEN changes over time, for example when becoming a parent, having a disabled child, experiencing different kinds of teaching settings and so on.

vii. Staff development

It is interesting to acknowledge some respondent's desire to move into wider roles within special education, which suggests that further professional development for leadership may be needed, particularly given SENCOs' widening role in the school (Mackenzie, 2007). It is crucial for schools to tap into this deeply-felt commitment to stay in education and to explore what factors that help or hinder this. The implication of this research is that teachers may need

different kinds of support at different life phases: at 15 or 16 years of teaching, they may require more part-time and flexible work to help meet the needs of work and family; at 20-plus years of teaching, support around health issues and sustaining and keeping motivation become paramount. At this later stage in teachers' careers, it is important to consider ways in which teachers' expertise, commitment to children with SEN and dedication to improving the wider special education system can be harnessed and maintained within education.

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APPENDICES

- i. Table Six: Percentage free school meals at all schools
- ii. Example of an information sheet
- iii. Example statement of informed consent
- iv. Example opening statement
- v. Example interview questions
- vi. Example focus group structure including vignettes and ranking structure

Appendix i. Table 6: Percentage free school meals at all schools

Table Seven: Percentage free school meals of all schools

	Below average FSM (16%)	16%-25% FSM	26%-30% FSM	30%-39% FSM	40% and above
Number of schools	6	16	2	8	3

Appendix ii: Example of an information sheet

INFORMATION SHEET



PARTICIPANTS- LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEWS

Special Educational Needs

I would like to invite you to participate in this original research project. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

This study is funded by the University of East London and is being undertaken at:

University of East London

School of Education

Romford Road

Stratford

London E15 4LZ

I am proposing to carry out life history interviews with about 10 people. The interviews will be individual, and are aimed at finding out why people wish to work in special educational needs.

The interviews will be taped on a digital voice recorder and transcribed by my research assistant. The research will be anonymous and the data will remain confidential. The interview will last no longer than 2 hours.

The project is directed by Suzanne Mackenzie.

You can contact Suzanne Mackenzie on 0208 223 2648 or via email at s.mackenzie@uel.ac.uk for further information.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form (enclosed.) If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

iii. **Example statement of informed consent**



Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet.

Title of Study: The reasons why people work in special educational needs.

- Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organizing the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part.
- If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.
- *I understand that if I decide at any other time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and be withdrawn from it immediately.*
- *I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated*

-

as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

- I consent to being recontacted about the possibility of participating in a follow-up interview*

Participant's Statement:

I -

agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.

Signed

Date

Investigator's Statement:

I -

confirm that I have carefully explained the nature, demands and any foreseeable risks (where applicable) of the proposed research to the volunteer.

Signed

Date

-

iv. Example opening statement

FOCUS GROUP OPENING REMARKS

SLOWLY

Welcome.

Welcome and thank you for coming to the focus group.

My name is Suzanne Mackenzie, and I'm a senior lecturer from the University of East London.

Each of you has been selected to participate because your point of view is important to us. We know that you are very busy and we greatly appreciate your contribution to this project. This interview is not a test, or should it in any way be viewed as a series of questions with right or wrong answers. Remember, we are very interested in what you think and feel. We want to know your opinions on these issues, and we are certainly not interested in your agreeing with the opinions and feelings of others. There may be times, however, when you do, and it is appropriate for you to let us know that as well.

The project is funded by the University of East London and but is completely independently organised by myself.

- The refreshments and rest rooms –move around as you wish
- An introduction to me, and my functions, and an introduction of who is conducting the research (i.e. the institution etc.)
- A description of the recording techniques to be used and Fiona.
- Using two Dictaphones: one as back up.
- A disclaimer relaying that I have no vested interests in the particular outcome of the focus group.
- A statement describing confidentiality.
- Please do not discuss what has been said outside the room.
- You will not be identified within the transcript and no personal details will be passed on.
- We have 90 minutes, and I will end on time.
- Small gift at the end.

Purpose. The purpose of this focus group interview is to determine your ideas and opinions about the topic of why people want to work in special needs, and particularly the role of the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO.)

Guidelines. There are a few guidelines I would like to ask you to follow during the focus group interview.

First, you do not need to speak in any particular order. When you have something to say, please do so.

Second, please do not speak when someone else is talking. Sometimes, the exchanges get emotional, and it is tempting to “jump in” when someone is talking, but we ask you to refrain from doing so.

Third, remember that there are other people in the group and it is important that we obtain the point of view of each one of you.

Fourth, you do not need to agree with what everyone or anyone in the group is saying.

Finally, because we have limited time together, I may need to stop you and redirect our discussion.

What questions do you have?

Okay, let's begin.

-

v. Example interview questions

LIFE HISTORY QUESTIONS

Introduction

Check: consent forms; demographic data forms; name badges

1. **Focus groups/interviewees:** What is your name? What do you study/teach? How long have you been teaching for?

Icebreakers:

2. How do you see yourself as a teacher?
3. Has that changed over the core of your teaching career?
4. What sort of special needs teacher are you?
5. How essential is 'special educational needs' to your personal identity?
6. Briefly articulate your philosophy of teaching; how has it changed over your teaching career?
7. When did you begin to teach? Have you taught in different schools?
8. Can you remember why you decided to go into teaching?

9. Tell me about your teacher training.

- Describe the course.
- What was the content of the course?
- How was the course taught?
- What was the emphasis placed on SEN in your teacher training. Do you think that this experience adequately prepared you to teach science effectively?

10. What does being a 'teacher' mean to you?

11. Can you remember the time when you first became interested in special educational needs?

12. Can you say a little more about why you became interested in special educational needs? (use as prompt for 5 if needed)

13. What do you feel has influenced your instructional methods of teaching SEN?

14. Do you interact much with other teachers regarding SEN issues?

Listen for: 'making a difference' and prompt

15. List the characteristics that are most important to be a special educational needs co-ordinator?

16. Which of the characteristics do you feel that you have?

17. Do you feel that the SENCO role is a leadership role?

18. Transition questions: prompts for me, based on what has been said.

19. One of the things we are especially interested in is why you wanted to become a special educational needs co-ordinator. Can you tell us about that?

20. What does being 'a SENCO' mean to you?

21. What do you think of the role of the SENCO? (distinguish between changing **your** role and changing the role generally)

22. What do you like least about the idea of working in special educational needs?

23. What do you enjoy most about working in SEN?

-

24. How have you found working with external agencies?

25. Can you describe your best day as a SENCO?

26. Do you find the role particularly stressful?

Other possible prompts:

- i. What do you remember about your first year of teaching?
- ii. Why do you stay in teaching?
- iii. What does 'making a difference' mean?
- v. Questions on resilience- why stay? Where do you see yourself in five years' time?
- vi. reaction to teacher training; influence of headteacher and head of department;
- vii. concern over status of self and profession;
- viii. and strong links between 'self' and subject;
- ix. What does it mean to you to be a 'special needs teacher'?
- x. Who influenced you in your work?
- xi. Has anyone been particularly encouraging?
- xii. Any 'chance' elements in your career, rather than intentional decisions?
- xiii. Do you see your involvement in teaching as a vocation rather than just a job?
- xiv. Did you teach because it suited you as a person?
- xv. How important is special needs to you? Or do other aspects of the job predominate?

- xvi. What advice would you give new teachers?
- xvii. What 'coping' or survival strategies do you have?

27. How do you find working with parents?

28. How do other people value the role, in your view?

29. Could you say more about why you stay working in SEN?

30. Have you ever thought of leaving teaching/SENCO role?

31. Has your view on the SENCO role changed over time? If so, how?

32. Was the role what you expected?

33. If you were working in the area of special educational needs in five years' time, what do you think you would be doing?

34. Suppose you were trying to encourage a friend to work with children with special educational needs. What would you say?

35. All things considered, of all of the reasons for working in special educational needs that were discussed, which one is the most important to you?

36. Is there anything that I have forgotten, or that I should have asked you?

Closing remarks

Thank you

What happens next

-
- vi. **Example focus group structure; including vignettes and ranking exercise**

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

- **90 minutes**
- Add timings

Introduction

37. What is your name? What do you study/teach?

38. What does the phrase 'special educational needs' mean to you?

After about 10-15 minutes:

39. Can you remember the time when you first became interested in special educational needs?

40. Have you ever worked with children with special needs? If so, can you tell us something about how you found the experience? (SIDETRACK?)

41. Can you say a little more about why you became interested in special educational needs? (use as prompt for 3/4 if necessary)

42. **Vignettes (THEY EACH GET A HANDOUT):** begin with one they identify with; get more complex

Do they think that they are realistic? Recognisable?

(Begin with the mundane first, as a focusing exercise.)

- Why do you think this person went into special educational needs?
- Where do you think their career is going?
- How does this person's career compare with your career pattern?
- How typical do you think this person is?
- Do any of your colleagues fit this description?

After all of the vignettes:

- Which one did you most identify with?
- If you were to describe the ideal SENCO, what would he/she be like?
- Do you think that a man can do the job?

VIGNETTES- PUT ON HANDOUT

SENCO 1

JANE is a SENCO in a primary school in Nottingham. She is 43 years old, and began her career at 22 as an English teacher. She took five years out of teaching to have children, and returned to teaching at 35 when she became interested in special educational needs. After attending several continuing professional development courses, she applied for the post of SENCO at her school and was successful.

SENCO 2

Grace is a 38 year old newly qualified teacher who began training at the age of 32 as a part-time, mature student, on a degree course in Education. After the primary PGCE, Grace obtained a job in a school in inner London. She is considering taking a higher degree in Inclusive Education and has attended a course run by the local authority on autistic spectrum disorders.

Grace has two children.

SENCO 3

Aisha has been teaching for 4 years and is 26. She is currently doing a higher degree and plans to apply for SENCO posts this year. She is a primary school teacher in London. She is single with no children.

SENCO 4

David is a 43 year old SENCO in a secondary school in Woking. He originally trained as a Maths teacher at the age of 35 after a series of non-teaching jobs. It is his first promoted post. He is married with three children.

SENCO 5

James is a 28 year old newly-appointed SENCO. This is his first promoted post in a mainstream school, after working as an English and PE teacher in a special school for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. He is married with no children. He works in a primary school in a village outside of Newcastle in the north east of England.

43. Ranking

SPLIT THE GROUP INTO TWO OR THREE IF IT IS BIG

Note to me: Put on cards

Make movement of the cards clear for the tape

Mention names in the ranking

Very few questions- non-directive

For focus group- List the characteristics that are most important to be a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, in order of preference.

For life history- which factors do you think are most important in influencing you to work in special educational needs?

Caring

Knowledge of special educational needs

Organised

Hard working

Good teacher

Committed to improving attainment

Works well with colleagues

Communicates well with parents

Communicates well with learning support assistants

Ambitious

Good manager

Life experience of special educational needs or disability (for example self, family)

Good listener

Leadership skills

44. Transition questions: prompts for me, based on what has been said.

Could you say more about?

Can you try to think of any alternatives?

We've been talking about X, can we now move on to Y?

One thing I've heard several people say is X. I wonder what the rest of you have to say about that?

One thing that I'm surprised no-one has mentioned is X. Does it matter, or not?"

Examples of ways to get alternative viewpoints:

- Who else has some thoughts about this- maybe something a little different?

- What else have people experienced in this area?
- You've been discussing several different ideas; what haven't we heard yet?

45. I recall that some of you mentioned something a little different earlier, and I wonder how things like X fit into the picture?

46. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the phrase 'special educational needs co-ordinator'?

47. Pick one or two if need to:

What do you think of the role of the SENCO?

What do you like least about the idea of working in special educational needs?

How did you feel about the idea of becoming a SENCO in the future? (if relevant)

If you were working in the area of special educational needs in five years' time, what do you think you would be doing?

Suppose you were trying to encourage a friend to work with children with special educational needs. What would you say?

Ending questions: allow 15 minutes

All things considered, of all of the reasons for working in special educational needs that were discussed, which one is the most important to you?”

Focus group only:

“Suppose you had one minute to talk on why you want **to become a SENCO** what would you say?

48. Summary; me do

- Is this an adequate summary?
- Did I correctly describe what was said?
- How well does that capture what was said?

49. Final question: needs 10 minutes:

- Is there anything that we have overlooked?
- Have we missed anything?
- What should I have asked you?

END:

- Thank you very much for your time.
- The data will now be transcribed by Fiona and analysed.
- There is a small gift as a token of my appreciation for your time.
- Send you a summary of the research.

